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ABSTRACT

The study presented in this book explores the causes of the problems in child care as an occupation and points to important social and political solutions. Chapter 1 describes work conditions, benefits, and problems related to child care workers. Chapter 2 gives specific information on the nature of the study, its goals, and the methods used. Chapters 3 and 4 analyze the study's interviews of 28 child care workers interviewed during the fall of 1987 and spring of 1988, exploring their feelings about their week and what they expect of their working life in the future. Chapter 4 concludes that the problems with child care as an occupation are largely financial in origin, and chapter 5 presents an analysis of the economics of traditional women's work. This in turn points to consumerism of our culture, which lures the richest nation in the world into treating its children with indifference, as discussed in chapter 6. Chapter 7 analyzes parental and governmental spending on child care, revealing the conflicted relationships between mothers and caregivers analyzed in chapter 8. The conclusion proposes basic recommendations for improving child care as an occupation. The appendix presents a review of the research on child care as an occupation. Contains over 300 references. (AA)

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CHILD CARE AS AN OCCUPATION IN A CULTURE OF INDIFFERENCE

Kathy Modigliani

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PREFACE

This book has emerged with a life of its own. Writing the last four chapters was an ever-surprising adventure. I felt like the four-year-old who, when asked what she was painting, said, "How should I know until it's finished?"

I began the study with a straight-forward concern about the national exodus of good child care workers from the occupation. Chapters 3 and 4 analyze my study's interviews with 28 caregivers in centers and homes in four communities, exploring their feelings about their work and what they expect of their worklives in the future.

Chapter 4's conclusion that the problems with child care as an occupation are largely financial in origin led me to an analysis of the economics of traditional women's work in Chapter 5. This in turn exposes the consumerism of our culture, which lures the richest nation in the world into treating its children with indifference, as discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 analyzes parental and governmental spending on child care, revealing the conflicted relationships between mothers and caregivers analyzed in Chapter 8. The Conclusion proposes basic recommendations for improving child care as an occupation.

This study explores the causes of the problems in child care as an occupation and points to important social and political solutions.

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GLOSSARY

Following are definitions of terms that are used in this study:

Child care center - Also known as a day care center, preschool or nursery school, these programs are located in a building other than a private home, such as a church, community center, private building, or school. Centers can be independent for-profits or non-profits or they can be partially or fully funded by public, religious, corporate or other sponsors. In this study the enrollment of centers ranged from 15 to 120 children, although some centers now enroll 200 or more children.

Child care workers, caregivers and teacher-caregivers - Used interchangeably to include family child care providers and center teachers and directors. Each of these terms connotes different aspects of the same work, and together they allow me to avoid irritating repetition.

Commodification - To make into a commodity or product of commerce, with corresponding loss of human qualities and personality.

Director - The administrator of a child care center, who may also be a teacher and/or owner.

Early Care and Education - The complete and accurate term for child care. Any good early childhood program, whether in home or center, part day or full day, is both caring and educational. The historical dichotomy between care and education is no longer relevant.

Family - In relation to a child, the parents, siblings, other relatives and/or sometimes unrelated people who care for and are responsible for that child.

Family child care home - A child care program offered in the provider's home (also known as family day care or babysitting). In this study, the enrollment in homes ranged from 3 to 14 children; a few had assistant caregivers.

Job satisfaction - A feeling of fulfillment of one's needs, values, expectations, or wishes, derived from one's employment. Job satisfaction is a multi-faceted composite of an individual's thoughts and feelings about the various aspects of work that are salient to that person.

Job dissatisfaction - Frustration, disappointment, alienation, or other negative responses to one's employment. Dissatisfaction is independent of satisfaction; it is possible for an individual to be highly satisfied and dissatisfied at the same time.

Massification - To treat a group of individuals as an objectified mass, with a corresponding lack of attention to human qualities and personality.

Provider - A person who offers family child care in her/his home, sometimes with one or more assistants.

Real Income - Income adjusted for inflation.

Regulation - Licensing, registration, or certification by the state. Child care centers are licensed in every state. Family child care homes are licensed or registered by 43 states. (Approximately 80-90% of family child care providers are unregulated — at this time we have little knowledge of how many of these are legally exempt because of the small number of children in care.)

Teacher - any child care center employee working directly with children, including head or lead teachers, assistants, and aides. (While family child care providers are also teachers, they usually do not identify with this term.)

Turnover - Replacement of one employee by another.

CHAPTER 1

CHILD CARE AS AN OCCUPATION

Child care has become a central feature of family life in the United States today. A majority of mothers return to work before their children's first birthdays. During the last fourteen years, the percentage of employed mothers of children under age one has jumped from 31% to 53% (Eckholm, 1992). The proportion of working mothers of preschool and school-age children has also grown significantly. An ever-increasing majority of these vulnerable young children are cared for by non-relatives, perhaps for half their waking hours.

Child care services have stretched rapidly to keep up with this increasing demand. But the growth has been fragmented, chaotic, and inadequate due to an absence of national planning combined with a paucity of resources. Of the industrialized countries, only South Africa is as negligent as the United States in supporting good, affordable care for all (Kamerman, 1991).

As a result, much of child care today is mediocre or even harmful to children. Most experts agree that children's early experiences have a formative influence on the rest of their lives. As children are shaped by child care, so are tomorrow's citizens, parents, and workers. Does anyone begin to understand the effect today's child care will have on the future of this nation?

What makes child care helpful or harmful to children and their families? The most important factor in determining quality, clearly, is the adults who take care of the children (Belsky, 1984; Clarke-Stewart, 1984; Espinosa, 1980; Fischer, 1989; Fosburg, 1981; Howes, 1986; Sale, 1973; Polakow (Suransky), 1982/1992; Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989). Caregivers determine "the variety, complexity, duration and tone of caregiving activities" (Fischer, 1989, p. 21). As they determine children's experience, they shape their development and learning. They influence whether or not children enter elementary school prepared and eager to learn, predisposed to trust teachers and get along with peers. Although it would be difficult to measure and quantify, child care workers' influence on young children is probably important throughout their lives.

While most working families with young children must rely on child care, little attention has been paid to those who provide this critical service. They are virtually invisible. The general invisibility of traditional women's work is exacerbated because much of child care occurs in the privacy of providers' or the child's home, or in isolated centers. What considerations influence caregivers' decisions to choose child care as an occupation? Why do they stay in the field or move on to another kind of work? What supports do child care workers need to do a good job in their part of raising our nation's young children?

The scope of this study includes child care workers[1] in two settings:

- those who work in their own homes, called "family child care providers," or simply "providers" (also known as "family day care providers" or "baby-sitters"); and
- those who work in child care centers, called "teachers," including assistants, and "directors."

All of these workers are also referred to collectively as "caregivers."

Of all children under age five with employed mothers, 24% are in family child care, plus some others who are cared for by relatives who also care for other children in their homes; 26% are in child care centers. It should be noted that more infants and toddlers are in family child care than all forms of center-based care combined. (O'Connell & Bachu, 1992)

This chapter reviews the basic context of the work of child care. There is not a great deal of research to draw upon, reflecting the invisibility and lack of resources that persist throughout all aspects of child care. Particularly little is known about family child care workers. In the past, the Bureaus of Labor Statistics and the Census have not classified providers as an occupational group separate from center teachers.[2]

The most visible problems in child care are the ones parents can see — the shortages, especially in infant care and the high costs, especially for lower-income parents.

The Child Care Labor Shortage

Before the women's movement of the 1970's, many women looking for jobs felt that child care was one of the few occupations open to and appropriate for them. But the dramatic broadening of women's career opportunities over the last two decades has changed that. Now, grandmothers and other female relatives who have traditionally been at home to take care of the children of working mothers have also gone to work outside their homes. Child care is shifting from relatives to neighbors and from neighbors to strangers.

Informal sources of information[3] suggest that the economic downturn has relaxed these trends at this time. In communities where parents are losing their jobs, child care demand is down. The current supply of child care and child care workers may be more sufficient in some communities now than it was a few years ago, except for infant care where the supply still seems to be inadequate in most communities. The child care labor shortage will probably become severe again whenever the unemployment rate turns around. In other words, it is only a matter of time. The deep structural problems with child care as an occupation have not been remedied by a dip in employment level.

This book examines the apparent paradox that the demand for care is rising while the supply of child care workers is shrinking. One obvious cause is that current caregivers are turning to jobs that pay more.

Income

Income statistics describe the most dramatic problem in this occupation. Child care is one of the two lowest-paid occupations in the United States of the 503 occupations categorized by the Census Bureau (National Committee on Pay Equity, 1987). Animal caretakers, parking lot attendants, carpet and drywall installers earn more than child care workers (see Appendix A.)

The recent study, *The Demand and Supply of Child Care in 1990*, showed that median income of center teachers, excluding assistants and aides, was under $11,000 per year. More than half of regulated family child care providers earned less than $8,000 before expenses (Willer, Hofferth, Kisker, Divine-Hawkins, Farquhar, & Glantz, 1991). Preliminary data from our Economics of Family Child Care study, now under way at Wheelock College, suggest that most providers incur $1,000-3,000 in expenses. Thus, family child care providers typically earn less than workers in almost any other kind of work (Modigliani, 1992a, in press).

Pay equity and comparable worth studies suggest that child care workers earn about half as much as these same people would earn in other jobs. For example, the average U.S.

female worker in 1987 earned more than twice what child care workers earned in 1988 in the Staffing Study, controlling for education (Whitebook et al., 1989). Unlike other workers, caregivers rarely receive raises for increased training or longevity on the job.

The Worthy Wage Campaign sponsored by the Child Care Employee Project and the Full Cost of Care Campaign sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children are helping teachers and providers identify what they would earn in income and benefits if they were compensated comparably to others in their communities with similar skills and responsibilities.

While some workers leave the field because of their poverty-level wages, others stay and endure the poverty. Living in poverty is stressful. How does this jeopardize the quality of child care workers' lives, and in turn the quality of care they offer children? How many children live in poverty because their parents work in child care?

Child care workers are subsidizing the families they serve while allowing local, state, and federal governments to avoid subsidizing low-income families. They are also subsidizing the parents' employers: "Through the undervalued wages of their teachers, child care centers subsidized American businesses to the tune of $2.4 billion in 1986 in providing child care for these business' employees." (Neugebauer, 1987, p. 14.) While this might have been an acceptable situation to women in the 50's and 60's, it is central to the thesis of this study that those values will not return.

Surely it would be wrong and overly simplistic to conclude from these wage levels alone that we intentionally choose to pay more to the workers who take care of our pets or cars than to those who take care of our children. It seems unlikely that parents or government consumers believe that it takes less training, skill, and responsibility to care for and educate a group of young children than it does to install dry wall sheeting or carpeting. In later chapters we will return to the reasons behind the low wages.

Fringe Benefits

Compensation for the majority of American workers includes, in addition to income, eight fringe benefits:

Health Insurance
Paid Vacation
Paid Holidays
Paid Sick Days
Paid Retirement Pension
Social Security
Disability Insurance
Unemployment Insurance

(Mishel & Frankel, 1991)

Barely two in five center teachers in the Staffing Study received health benefits and barely one in five received a retirement pension (Whitebook et al., 1989). Findings from regional studies show major geographical variations in benefit findings. Most family child care providers are not covered by any of these benefits, according to our Economics of Family Child Care study in progress at Wheelock College, unless they are married to someone whose employer provides family health insurance. A few family child care providers are beginning to charge parents for paid vacations and holidays. See Appendix A for a review of several studies' findings about fringe benefits.

Thus, the low compensation in child care includes lack of benefits as well as income. Informal information suggests that center benefits may be increasing gradually in response to the teacher recruitment and retention problems, although medical insurance was less available in Wisconsin centers in 1988 than in 1980 (Riley & Rodgers, 1989).

Turnover

As described in Appendix A, child care has a turnover rate matched by only the most menial occupations, such as news vendors and gas station attendants. Child care is unlike the others in many ways, including the considerably greater responsibility and skill required as well as the ability to establish long-term relationships with clients.

The best assessment of center teacher turnover in the last decade is found in the National Child Care Staffing Study — referred to here as "the Staffing Study" (Whitebook et al., 1989). This study analyzed the nature and of center-based child care in five metropolitan areas. Teaching staff in the study's centers had an average annual turnover rate of 41% in 1988; follow-up phone calls showed an additional turnover of 37% in just the next six months. This rate contrasts sharply with the relatively low turnover of 15% found in a parallel study in 1977. Something has changed.

The most important predictor of turnover in the Staffing Study was low wages; those who earned $4.00 per hour or less were twice as likely to leave their jobs as those who earned over $6.00 per hour. Teachers' wages in 1988 had fallen 27% in the previous decade; assistants' had fallen 20%.

Numerous other small studies of child care center teacher turnover confirm this picture (Espinosa, 1980; Modigliani, Kell, Valenstein, McDaniels, Norton, Manchester, Webber, & Wheeler, 1985; Pierburg, 1984; Seiderman, 1978; Smith & Spence, 1980; Whitebook, 1981). These studies identify low wages, lack of benefits, lack of opportunity for advancement, and stressful working conditions as the primary causes of turnover.

The California Retention Study (Lawrence, Brown, & Bellm, 1989) tracked turnover of family child care providers who had been recruited and supported by the California Child Care Initiative. The most significant cause of turnover among those who had stopped caring for children, beside relocation, was inadequate or unstable income. Those who stayed in business were more likely to be married and depend upon a spouse's income. Little else is known about the turnover rate of family child care providers, because there has been very little research pertaining to this group.

Parents' Fees and Reimbursements

The standard explanation for the low wages in child care is that parents cannot afford to pay more. The cost of child care varies by region and by age. A survey of resource and referral agencies reported in the April, 1990 issue of the *Child Care Information Exchange* found that the average annual fee for infant care in Dallas, Texas was $3,900, while in Boulder, Colorado it was $6,604. The corresponding fees for 4-year-olds was $3,380 and $4,472, and ranged from a low of $3,120 in Orlando, Florida to $7,176 in Boston, Massachusetts. The Children's Defense Fund calculated that infant care in Boulder would cost 77.7% of the income of a single parent working full-time at minimum wage, and 45.9% of such a single parent in Dallas. The cost of 4-year old care would be 52.6% of such a parent's income in Boulder and 39.8% in Dallas. (Children's Defense Fund, 1991)

Thus, for most parents child care is a major expense. The current recession has hurt young families, who are working longer hours to offset the decline in real wages per hour (Mishel & Frankel, 1991). Many low-income families truly cannot afford to pay as much as they must pay now, as discussed in Chapter 7. The Demand and Supply Study found that families earning less than $15,000 per year pay on average 23% of their income for child care — thereby reducing the amount they can spend on necessities and virtually eliminating discretionary spending. Meanwhile, families earning over $50,000 pay only 6% (Willer et al., 1991). A Harris Poll in 1989 found that low-income parents are paying almost as much as the very wealthiest families and a very high percentage of their total income. For example, single mothers' child care costs averaged $211/month while business executives spent $244/month(Harris & Associates, 1989). Unfortunately, this study did not control for number of hours of care. Upper-income parents probably pay at a somewhat higher rate, as well as requiring fewer hours of care.

In fact, affordability for lower-income parents is another major problem in child care, especially in the majority of states that do not have adequate governmental subsidies and seldom adjust them for inflation. In these states, reimbursement levels are so low that they do not nearly cover the actual cost of care and act as a damper on non-subsidized child care rates. While recent federal child care legislation pertaining to child care for at-risk families or parents in jobs training may lead to higher reimbursement rates as well as additional spaces for children, the results of the political maneuvering over these new funds are not yet available.[4] Certainly there will not be enough new funding to make a significant difference overall. Many lower-income parents will still not qualify for assistance with child care expenses.

In the Harris Poll, 90% of the general public agreed with the following statement: "Currently, child-care providers receive the same pay as parking lot attendants. In order to attract higher-caliber providers, training and work conditions need to be improved and wages need to be raised." (Harris & Associates, 1989)

The National Day Care Home Study (Divine-Hawkins, 1981) found that nearly 60% of all parents would be willing to pay more for the care they were currently receiving (p. 24). Not only was this finding not reported widely, but the study itself concluded that "to permit or mandate improvements in their earnings would impose severe burdens on consumers of family day care – both parents and government" (p. 41).

Government has a short-term financial stake in keeping wages low. In the late 1970s, fees would have had to be raised by 59% in regulated homes to bring providers up to minimum wage — parallel figures were 28% in sponsored homes and 190% in unregulated homes. (Singer, Fosburg, Goodson, & Smith, 1980).

NPR Commentator John Merrow (1986) argues that upper-income parents can and should pay more:

> Families manage to find the money for college tuition somehow (we may be talking about $15,000 a year there) but we simply aren't willing to pay for quality services for children. Well over half of those who work in child care earn poverty-level wages; the median earnings of family day care providers in 1984 was $4,420. . . .
>
> Quality child care costs money, . . . that's an inescapable fact. And we also know that very young children are capable of incredible learning, and we know that more and more mothers are in the work force. We're on a collision course, between what we and our children need, and our own tight-fistedness.

But parents have not managed to afford college tuitions without government support, especially student loans. The parents who must pay for child care are younger, and usually earn less, than parents of college students. In many countries where child care is a higher public priority than in the U.S., services are partially or fully subsidized for all parents (Kamerman, 1991; Kamerman & Kahn, 1991).

In child care workers' eagerness to protect low-income parents and their tacit acceptance of the devaluation of child care as work, they forget that upper-income parents could actually afford to pay the true cost of this family service. In fact, child care workers are subsidizing many upper-income families through their lost wages. As will be seen in the recommendations, sliding scales and scholarships are one part of the solution to the trilemma of problems: affordability, wages, and quality.

Lack of Opportunity for Advancement

The field of child care is similar to public school teaching in its relatively few opportunities for advancement. New child care providers and teachers often have the same responsibilities as experienced ones, and they often have the same incomes (Singer et al., 1980; Whitebook et al., 1989, Whitebook et al., 1982). Although teachers can advance by moving to a better center, they often have to move out of teaching and into administration or other kinds of work to gain higher salaries. Thus, child care is often seen as a dead-end job. Neugebauer (1984) found this to be child care teachers' second greatest frustration, after rate of pay.

If family child care providers improve the quality of their programs, they may be able to raise their rates a bit, or if they have enough space they can hire a second caregiver and admit more children, but their potential income and status has a low ceiling in most communities.

Decreasing Quality of Caregivers

There are other signs of trouble, as discussed in Appendix A. Trained teachers are being replaced by untrained ones. A decade ago, a majority of child care center teachers held college degrees, often with majors in early childhood education or child development. It is difficult to hire such well-qualified teachers today (Modigliani, 1986). With the shortage of workers has come a lowering of center hiring standards. Because the quality of the caregivers determines the quality of care, the trend is a negative influence on quality of care.

Because family child care has not received its share of attention in the profession, we have not yet clearly defined family child care quality as it differs from center quality.[5] Thus we do not have any valid, reliable evidence about changes in the quality of family child care providers (Modigliani, 1990a). This raises the question of whether child care should be considered skilled or unskilled labor (Modigliani, 1991). It can be performed either way — many caregivers in centers and homes have no training or screening. A few of them are doing an excellent job, but most of them are not. Appendix A describes research findings showing that:

- both specialized education in child development and early education and total amount of education are correlated with child care quality
- child care workers overall have had more years of education than the average U.S. worker
- the low salaries in the field have produced declining enrollments in college early childhood courses.

Thus the question becomes, what level of child care quality do we want to pay for? Unfortunately, the parents and taxpayers who pay for child care today do not understand the negative consequences of underfunding. We examine this question further in later chapters.

It is logical that the same factors that cause child care workers to leave the field also cause potential workers to stay away: income, benefits, opportunity for advancement, and working conditions.

Although research evidence is sparse, some conclusions about child care working conditions are fairly evident. Several negative child care working conditions have been identified, though the degree and frequency of the various kinds of stress are not known.

Low Status

While studies of child care worker turnover have usually identified the low wages in the field as the primary problem, the low social status of this work is clearly an issue as well. Mattingly (1977) identified the toll that lack of recognition takes on child care workers. She pointed to the discrepancy between society's idea of child care teachers as baby-sitters, and the actual complexity and intensity of their work. Riley and Rodgers found that virtually 100% of caregivers in their study of Wisconsin centers and homes disagreed with the statement "Providers are basically just baby-sitters," but 93% believe that the public views their work as baby-sitting 1989). Carol Joffe (1977) observed that nursery school teachers felt a lack of respect from parents complicated by feelings of jealousy and competition (this topic will be discussed in Chapter 4).

The Staffing Study found that teachers who believe that child care has higher status than other jobs — including those jobs they were qualified to fill — were more satisfied with their jobs (Whitebook et al., 1989).

Within the field of early care and education, preschool teachers are considered to have more status than child care center teachers, and they in turn are considered higher status than family child care providers. Family child care providers chafe under the lack of respect they often feel from center workers.

Work Overload and Burnout

We see in Appendix A that providers and some center staff work well over 40 hours per week, but this has not been identified as a major dissatisfaction. Center teachers may have to work long hours with no breaks. Sometimes they must be responsible for large numbers of children (Whitebook et al, 1989). As seen in the discussion of fringe benefits, many have little time off for vacation or even illness.

"Burnout" is a syndrome that occurs especially in social service work, including child care centers and homes:

> Burnout is a change in attitude and behavior in response to a demanding, frustrating, unrewarding work experience. It includes loss of concern for the client, detached affect and behavior on the job, and a mechanical approach involving little effort. Other signs are a strong aversion to coming to work, an inability to concentrate, and frequent "clock-watching." (Cherniss, 1980. p. 89).

Factors producing burnout in child care workers, identified in Appendix A, are:

- poor staff-child ratios
- no breaks
- few if any vacations
- lack of substitutes

Studies of public school teachers suggest that supports that reduce burnout include:

- shared decision making
- clearly articulated goals
- constructive supervision and feedback
- open and frequent communication
- recognition of professional skill
- opportunities for autonomy and creativity
- social support of colleagues

People who feel committed to their jobs are resistant to burnout.

Grief and Loss

It is likely that some child care workers experience stress from grief and loss when children leave. Nelson (1990) identifies that family child care providers who work long hours with just a few children, often for several years, become very attached to them. She observed that they often learn to hold back some of the intensity of this bonding to protect themselves from feeling such pain and loss.

Other Working Conditions.

Limited Equipment. Many programs are financially unable to purchase adequate equipment or toys. Sometimes providers cannot afford to make the basic improvements needed for children's safety. This in turn serves as a barrier to regulation.

Lack of Labor Unions. A lack of organized labor distinguishes child care as an occupation from some other traditional women's jobs like public school teaching, nursing, and social work. Through unionization, these other three occupations have repositioned themselves in the occupational income hierarchy.

In nursing, unions have been able to take advantage of the increased demand for nurses in a system that has the resources to pay more. Previously compressed career ladders offering only a few increases in pay grades have been greatly expanded, for example from 5 to 18 steps in one hospital. "In cities like New York, Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles, a Nurse can earn $60,000 or $70,000 a year for a full-time job." ("V.I.P. Treatment," 1990, p.14)

The salaries and benefits of public school teachers increased dramatically as a result of unionization, as did those of social workers who work for governments, hospital workers, or other institutions with "deep pockets."

As described in Appendix A, comparable worth job campaigns, sometimes sponsored by unions, have produced some success stories for child care staff employed by larger institutions. But on the whole, efforts to organize child care workers have been successful only in a few progressive communities.[6]

Inadequate Government Support. Governments of most other developed countries have made child care a much more important priority than has the United States. In Denmark, for example:

> The government supplies the provider with equipment, consumable play materials, and liability insurance. Providers are considered to have a job equivalent to a person working in a child care center; hence, they are covered by

> something equivalent to worker's compensation and have sick leave, five weeks of paid vacation, and paid release time for training. Medical coverage and retirement pensions are national programs to which everyone belongs and contributes through taxes. Family day care providers are not taxed on one-third of their income in consideration of the costs of food, food preparation, heat and light, and household wear and tear associated with the care of children.
>
> . . . Parent fees for family day care range from about $70 to about $110 per month. Using a national sliding scale for these fees, based on family size and income, parents with family income above $13,500 pay the full parent share while those with family income below $4,000 pay nothing. Between those two points, parents pay between 5% and 99% of the parent fee. (Corsini, 1991, pp. 11-12)

In most developed nations, taxpayers support strong child care policy for their nation's young children and families (Kamerman, 1991).

Few male workers. Nationally, 96% of all child care workers (not in private households) are women (Current Population Survey, 1987). Some of the more progressive communities surveyed show slightly larger percentages of men in child care — up to 11% in San Francisco in 1978-79 (Whitebook, 1981) and 8% men in Washtenaw County Michigan in 1984 (Modigliani et al., 1985). While even fewer family child care providers are men, it is not uncommon to find a wife and husband running a large group home together.

In sum, child care as an occupation in the United States has little support. The pay is poor, the work is hard, the hours are often long, there is little respect or recognition. So why *would* anyone do this work? The answer is "job satisfaction."

Job Satisfaction

The most comprehensive study of child care job satisfaction was carried out in the child care centers of Washtenaw County, Michigan in 1984; I was on the research team. Seventy-one of the 83 centers in the county (86%) participated in the study, as did 277 teachers and directors (81%). See Appendix B for a description of this study and a summary of findings.

In analyzing the Michigan data, I began to see the complexity of the phenomenon of job satisfaction and the importance of its role in keeping good workers in the field. They put up with their dissatisfactions because they felt a stronger sense of satisfaction. Other findings about job satisfaction in child care workers, reviewed in Appendix A, are consistent with the Michigan results.

Analysis of the study's comprehensive job satisfaction and commitment data paints a more complex picture than do other studies. Consider the following statements that correlated strongly with being committed to one's center and not looking for another job (Pearson *r* correlations are shown in parentheses; all of these correlations are significant at the .0001 level):

I like my present job (.55)

I feel intellectually stimulated in my job (.53)

I like the administrative set-up in my school (.49)

I have a great deal of influence on center policy (.45)

I like my present opportunity for taking responsibility (.44)

I like the flexibility and autonomy of my job (.42)

I like my present work schedule (.39)

I have good communication with the board/owner (.38)

I feel that there is enough support staff at my center (.38)

I have opportunities to progress in salary (.33)

I am informed about what goes on in the center (.31)

The survey data suggest that teachers and directors put up with their dissatisfactions for such reasons. Maximizing satisfaction as well as minimizing dissatisfaction appear to be keys to attracting and keeping a qualified workforce. The results begged for further, deeper understanding. Did the Michigan study include all the relevant variables? Which aspects of job satisfaction are important to which individuals? How do people resolve the contradictory forces that frustrate and please them about their work?

An in-depth study of child care as an occupation requires careful attention to individual differences in people and their responses to their particular work environments. Individuals vary in what satisfies and dissatisfies them; commitment too is a highly individualized phenomenon. Understanding the lived experience of child care workers — the way they perceive the satisfactions, dissatisfactions, and commitments of their work will contribute to planning the changes necessary to reduce the negative and increase the positive aspects of the work.

The next chapter describes the methods used in this study. Findings from the interviews are presented in Chapters 3 and 4, which analyze the themes and variations in child care workers' satisfactions and dissatisfactions about their work. Chapters 5 through 7 discuss the economic and socio-cultural contexts of child care as work in the United States. Chapter 8 explores the troubled relationships between parents and caregivers that keep them from working together to address the problems of child care. The Conclusion summarizes the current situation in child care as an occupation in a culture of indifference and points to possible directions for change.

Notes to Chapter 1

[1] I use the term "child care workers" to call attention to this group as a workforce, though many of these people dislike the term. They feel it dehumanizes and minimizes the importance of what they do — they think of "fast food worker." But I continue to use the term to focus on the workforce. I also use "caregiver" to denote anybody who takes care of children as a job, for pay. This term minimizes their important educational role, but to date we have no more acceptable term. "Teacher/caregiver" and "educarer" are too awkward, and many family child care providers do not accept the label "teacher."

[2] The Bureaus of the Census and Labor Statistics have included both family child care providers and child care center workers in the same occupational category until the 1990 Census. As of the 1990 Census, they will break the category "Child Care Worker, Except Private Household" into "Family Child Care Provider" and "Other Child Care Workers." (Personal communication, John Priebe, Bureau of the Census, May 23, 1991. I initiated this change, and look forward to working with the new data.) Unfortunately, center teachers will still be combined with a hodgepodge of others including foster parents, residential treatment workers, and school-bus attendants. The category "Child Care Worker, Private Household" pertains to "baby-sitters" and "nannies," those who work in the households of their employers.

[3] My main informants of up-to-the-minute supply and demand information are staff members of community child care resource and referral agencies across the country.

[4] While the new Child Care Development Block Grant and Title IV-A funding will provide a small increase in government support of low-income parents' purchase of child care, and increased Head Start funding will reach more parents (who do not need full-day child care in most cases), these programs are bandaids that reach a small minority compared to the numbers of families supported in other countries. In spite of the new funding, our government's greatest support for child care is still tax credits to middle-class parents through the Dependent Care Tax Credit and Dependent Care Assistance Plans of their employers.

[5] For example, most instruments that assess quality of care do not adequately assess provider-child or provider-parent relationships, or the way the provider's own children and other househnteract with the child care children.

[6] The *Child Care Employee News*, published by the Child Care Employee Project, provides information on the activities of unions and employee alliances. (6536 Telegraph Avenue, Oakland, CA 94609).

CHAPTER 2

THE STUDY

The previous chapter described child care as an occupation in trouble. The current study was designed to take a deeper look at the complex and sometimes contradictory attitudes of child care workers. This chapter describes the methods used to conduct the study, beginning with the assumptions that guided the research design.

The Choice of Method

The choice of method is a question of epistemology. What exactly do I want to know? Do I want to explore something unknown? Do I want to test hypotheses? What kind of evidence would be most effective for the audience I want to reach?

The original purpose of this study was to answer questions raised by the findings of the Michigan Working Conditions Project, presented in Appendix B. That survey suggested that job satisfaction and commitment are glues that keep teachers in their jobs, even when they are dissatisfied with some aspects of their work. The survey data hinted that individuals respond differently to similar situations, but offered no explanation for the differences. We could not explain how people resolved or lived with the contradictions of their daily worklives.

As philosopher of science Abraham Kaplan noted in *The Conduct of Inquiry* (1964), some concepts lend themselves to easy and confident verification, but those that are not directly observable call for a more subtle, complex approach. Quantification is helpful to verify or disprove hypotheses — if they can be described in measurable concepts. But we can not "measure how high is the morale of a group or how deep is the repression of a memory. . . ." (pp. 41-42). Even though the Michigan survey was unusually deep and comprehensive for a survey, its results seemed superficial as we tried to comprehend the lived experiences of these workers.

The concepts of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction were particularly elusive and complex. Some of the most interesting implications of these concepts appear to lie in the nuances of differences among people. As Kaplan suggested, there seemed more to be learned by studying the disarray among child care workers' perceptions than by disregarding it as we did in the statistical analysis. Measurement theorists say that indicators of concepts must be developed that can be successfully measured. But to define such indicators, one must have a clear understanding of the phenomena behind them. The more I studied job satisfaction and the related and contradictory attitudes of child care workers, the more I wanted to muck around in these phenomena, among the things themselves.

Bill Ayers, in *The Good Preschool Teacher* (1989), writes that the details of teachers' everyday practice with children contain the secrets of teaching and that valuable detail is washed away in attempts to generalize about teaching. This is what I felt we had done with the Michigan project. Implications that emerged in the few open-ended questions were lost in the homogenization of the subsequent statistical analysis. It was often the open-ended answers that shed light on the context and meaning of the findings. They also raised more new questions without suggesting answers.

One final argument for using an in-depth approach was that I wanted to understand the social and cultural contexts of these peoples' worklives — I wanted to see where they worked and lived and what their communities were like. This turned out to be critically important to the ecological validity of the study.

All of these concerns led me to the choice of open-ended interviews rather than a more controlled and specified form of inquiry. Several researchers have influenced my approach. Valerie Polakow's and Loren Barritt's courses in Human Science Research and the ongoing

Phenomenology Seminar at the University of Michigan laid the basic groundwork. "Stories are the clues which will lead us to new ways of knowing." (Polakow, 1985) I have tried to capture the stories of the people I interviewed. Analysis involves describing the main themes of these stories with detailed illustrations that convey their personal meanings yet also speak in some way to the broader field.

Because satisfaction and related perceptions cannot be observed, I chose to use interviews rather then ethnographic observations as my main source of data. But rather than interview a few teachers and providers in great depth, as human science would commonly suggest, I decided to talk to enough people so that I could get a sense of range and breadth of perceptions of a cross-section of the occupation. I decided to interview people who took care of children in centers and family day care homes, omitting caregivers who work in the child and family's home. I also decided to include regional diversity.

Two other approaches to qualitative interviewing and data analysis have influenced me. One is ethnography, as practiced by Robert Coles (1967, 1978), for instance, and as described by Clifford Geertz (1973, 1983). Geertz recommends that researchers begin by collecting "thick descriptions" of a topic of interest, full of rich detail, each one different from the others, within a defined cultural context. After describing the distinctive features, the researcher should tack back and forth between the detailed observations and "increasingly synoptic characterizations. . . in such a way that, held in the mind together, they present a credible, fleshed-out picture of a human form of life. . . . catching 'their' views in 'our' vocabulary." (1983, p. 10)

This analysis requires sifting through the characterizations,

> *sorting out the structures of signification. . . and determining their social ground and import. . . .* What the ethnographer is in fact faced with . . . is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures . . . which he must contrive somehow *first to grasp and then to render.* (1973, pp. 9-10, italics mine)

This grasping and rendering is the challenge of the analysis. The analysis then preceded through the

> *oscillation between looking particulately at particular views and defining globally the attitude that permeates them* . . . Only here there is an attempt to push things on to broader issues: the construction of . . . categories, the generality of their reference, and the conditions of their use. (1983, p. 11, italics mine)

George Rosenwald, in the University of Michigan course, The Clinical Interview, encourages researchers to look beyond the stereotyped and idealized presentations that people tend to make to each other. For instance, most people say that they are satisfied with their jobs. Are they really? What do they mean by that? Is that the answer one is supposed to give in this culture — a "press release?" "How are you?" "Fine." . . . "How do you like your job?" "Fine." Rosenwald warns that a researcher must not take the superficial, idealized presentation as the whole truth. The contradictions within the interviewees' stories show that their feelings are ambivalent — behind many workers' satisfactions lurk a dark side of frustration.

Concerning objectivity, I began this work with clear opinions formed from years of being a participant-observer, as a child care teacher-director. I tried to be as self-aware and open-minded as possible. I believe I had no vested interest in any particular finding. I learned far beyond what I thought I understood.

With this philosophical orientation and methodological approach I began choosing interviewees.

The Four Sites

The first nine interviews were conducted in Washtenaw County, Michigan — the same community where the survey had been conducted. After I felt grounded in the range of attitudes found among the teachers and providers in my own community, I went to Seattle for three weeks of interviewing in October, 1987. Two months later I went to Atlanta, then to Boston in the spring of 1988. One Boston interview, was conducted in 1986.

The nature of child care varies in several ways from one region to another, especially in: state licensing standards (which affect staff ratios and group size),[1] levels of education and child-relevant education, compensation, and degree of professionalism. The National Day Care Study chose Atlanta, Seattle, and Detroit for their study sites because these cities were heterogeneous in such factors (Ruopp, R., Travers, J. Glantz, F., & Coelen, C., 1979a, b). I chose the cities of Atlanta, Seattle, Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti and Boston for similar reasons.[2]

Selecting Interviewees

The basic approach for choosing respondents followed what Glaser and Strauss, in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), call "theoretical sampling." They suggest that first interviews should be focused on people who are similar to each other. Minimizing differences among subjects helps the researcher define the properties of the categories which will emerge as the structure for analysis — the basic themes and variations.

Accordingly, I began my interviews with people in my own community, first center teachers and directors in different types of programs and then family child care providers. The decision to begin in my own community was also consistent with Clifford Geertz's concept of local knowledge — one should begin a study with fine-combed observations within a familiar subculture (1983). From the beginning, I strove for diversity in social class, age, and race. I knew personally a sizable percentage of the teachers and directors in the county — many were also subjects in the earlier Working Conditions Project. Thus I began this study as a participant observer.

After general familiarity with the topic and a sense of interrelationships of the categories and themes has been achieved, Glaser and Strauss recommend moving out to maximize the differences among the groups being studied, so as to understand the full range of possible variation. Geertz recommends studying other subcultures. In my case the obvious factor to vary was geography.

The sites were chosen to replicate those of the National Day Care Study (Coelen et al., 1979a,b), although I included suburban and rural areas around Seattle and Atlanta and Washtenaw County, Michigan instead of Detroit. These three communities differ in demographics and culture. Boston was added as an additional site because it is known within the field to support a particularly high quality of child care.

Nothing had prepared me for the culture shock — I expected child care to be quite similar from one region to another. While this study was not comprehensive enough to yield unequivocal understandings, I formed some tentative impressions. For example, as will be seen in the next chapter, it was of major importance to several Atlanta providers, teachers, and directors alike that they were performing a Christian mission. I had not heard this sentiment described in Michigan or Seattle, although I did hear it one more time in inner-city Boston. Similarly, for-profit centers including chains were popular in Atlanta, non-existent in Washtenaw County and Boston at that time, and uncommon in Seattle. (With this program type tends to come the lowest salaries, highest turnover, and lowest education levels of teachers. The proportion of the child care market filled by for-profits is increasing.) The professional leadership contributed by the early-childhood-education programs in Boston was largely missing in the other three communities. The Boston area was similar to Michigan in many ways with a stronger community standard of quality supported by a strong regulatory system.

Some qualitative researchers interview a very few people in great depth. Others keep interviewing new people until a phenomenon which Glaser and Strauss refer to as "theoretical saturation" occurs, when additional interviews with people in different circumstances no longer yield new basic information. I decided to continue until I had some sense of saturation, rather than studying fewer people in depth. In the end I interviewed 34 people (11 family child care providers, 11 center teachers, 6 center directors, and 6 other child care informants).

In each community except my own, I began by interviewing two people who worked in some way with the child care system — resource and referral agency staff and active members of the Association for the Education of Young Children and family child care associations. This approach did add ecological validity because of the informants' knowledge of their communities. After understanding the role of regulation, funding, community programs, and other unique characteristics of each locality, I also got these informants to recommend a few interviewees.

I chose to focus the study on "good child care workers" — defined as "good in the broadest sense of the word — the kind of people we would like to keep in the field." The judgment of "good" was left to my informants and the caregivers' reputation in the community. The remainder of the interviewees I identified through parents, other interviewees, or other early childhood professionals. When I asked agency staff for recommendations of "good" providers, they could usually recommend centers with good reputations but they had not observed family day care providers. It was beyond the scope of this study to assess the quality of care in these programs, but I believe the quality was above average — for example, I saw little of the negative practices described by Polakow [Suransky] (1982/1992). But several, perhaps one-quarter, of the caregivers said or did things that I would not define as "good."

Characteristics of the Sample

The 28 child care workers interviewed during the Fall of 1987 and Spring of 1988 lived and worked in urban areas and close suburbs, and a few in outlying small towns or rural areas. They were diverse in type of child care program and education level. I slightly oversampled African-Americans and men. Latinos/Hispanics were not represented because, unfortunately, there were few Latinos in the geographical areas chosen. The interviewees were diverse in social class, although there was some tendancy for middle-class caregivers to have more to say in answer to my questions, and thus they are quoted with somewhat greater frequency in this study. Social class differences are discussed whenever they appeared.

Following is a summary of the demographics of the interviewees:

Job Role

11 Family Day Care Providers
11 Child Care Center Teachers or Assistant Teachers
6 Child Care Center Directors or Teacher-Directors
6 Community Informants
(Resource and Referral Agency Staff, Licensing Staff,
College Instructors)

Sex

29 Female (includes 5 community informants)
5 Male (includes 1 community informants

Race/Ethnicity

26 White (includes 5 community informants)
7 African-American (includes 1 community informant)
1 Asian-American

Age

6	20-29 years
11	30-39 years
12	40-49 years
3	50-59 years
2	60-69 years

The Interview

The interviews were conducted in interviewees' homes or offices at their centers. Although we chose the quietest part of the day, some of the family day care providers were taking care of children during parts of our interviews. Center staff were not responsible for children during our conversations. Most of the interviews lasted between one-and-a-half and two hours, though a few took four hours or more. In about one-third of the cases we had a second conversation within two weeks. Occasionally I telephoned people with one or more follow-up questions.

I was able to establish quick rapport with most interviewees simply by telling them that I was concerned about how we could make child care a good job for people like them, and I wanted to talk to many teachers and providers to understand how they felt. Then I read them the Informed Consent Statement,[3] asked them to sign it. Then I asked if they would mind if I taped our interviews under the condition that they could tell me if they did not want to be quoted or to turn the recorder off at any time. Every interviewee readily signed the Consent Statement and agreed to be taped.

It was my clear sense that the recorder did not usually inhibit interviewees beyond a self-consciousness for the first few minutes. The exceptions were two women, both very low-income, timid people who had not finished high school or worked in any other kind of job; neither of them ever gave more than superficial answers to my questions. I wondered if the tape recorder had been a mistake for them. One other teacher, for whom it was very important to be knowledgeable about early childhood education, seemed to be trying to impress me and perhaps herself throughout the interview. This may have been exacerbated by the recorder. With these three exception, I felt that the rest of the interviewees, regardless of education, social class, race, or sex were generally deeply engaged in the conversation and interested in exploring their depth of feeling. Being able to listen to the tapes several times as well as transcribe important sections was most helpful in the analysis.

After tending to preliminaries, I turned on the tape recorder and simply explained:

> The main thing I want to know about is how you came to child care and to this job, how you feel about what you're doing today, and where you see your work going in the future. Please begin the story wherever it begins for you.

Everyone seemed to know what I meant, and most people immediately launched into a narrative. It is not an exaggeration to say that many talked for at least an hour giving their answer to this basic question. I asked for clarification whenever I was aware of not being sure what the person meant or when I wanted a deeper explanation.

I prepared several follow-up questions to ask if they were not answered in the narrative, although in most cases only a couple were necessary. The questions I used most were:

- "Can you tell me about something that happened recently that made you happy you are doing this work?" and then "What about something that made you wish you had a completely different kind of work?"
- "What do your friends and family think of your work?"
- (If people alluded to strong dissatisfactions, I asked) "Have your ever talked to others about that? What did you say?"

Almost everyone thanked me for the interview. No one seemed to feel it burdensome. Many commented on how interesting it had been for them. Several mentioned being grateful that someone wanted to hear about the stories of their work.

The next page summarizes the method used to analyze the interviews, followed by an example of the thematic analysis notes:

Method of Analysis

The Steps. To analyze the interviews I used a human science approach to thematic analysis, including the following steps:

1. Listen to the tapes of each interview at least twice. Define an overall understanding of what the person is saying and identify the parts of the interview that seem especially interesting and informative in relation to the research questions.

2. Transcribe those portions of the interviews identified as key. Use the speakers exact words (with minor exceptions)[4].

3. Read the transcriptions while listening to the corresponding tapes. Underline the phrases in the transcript that seem important for any reason (see example on the next page). Although it is an intuitive process, there is surprisingly high agreement among "coders" who use this method in the Human Science Research classes about which phrases and themes are important to a respondent. Though it is a subjective process, there is usually good inter-rater reliability.

4. List in the right margin of the transcript all tentative ideas about the themes in this text (see example on the next page). Think carefully about what each person is really saying and the feelings behind the words.

Watch for themes on all levels: psychological, social, organizational, cultural, political. There is no limit to the content of possible themes. They might be feelings (anger, fatigue, excitement, ambivalence), or issues (low salaries, respect of parents), or comparative concepts (income relative to age, education in relation to social status). Some of these seem to scream out from the data, others are unspoken. Still others will not be found until later, when a future respondent will say something which enlightens the meaning of a comment heard earlier.

5. Look for overall patterns across all interviews. Describe and interpret these themes and their variations.

6. Draw conclusions. Read literature on the themes which emerge as key to understanding the central phenomena. (Note that most of the literature reviewed for this approach *follows* rather than precedes the data gathering. Only after the patterns are identified can they be placed in a theoretical context.)

Procedures for Thematic Analysis. Following is a sample transcript with thematic analysis notation. After transcribing all key sections of the interview, I underlined the most telling phrases. Next, in the column on the right, I named the themes I thought the person was expressing. These themes and variations were categorized into a theoretical classification scheme, which became the topic headings in Chapters 3 and 4. Finally, the themes of each interview were revised in light of the theoretical analysis.

Text	**Themes**
[counter = 52] If I were making $25,000 a year, and the	DISSAT w WAGES
parents whose children I teach and nurture did not look	BITTERNESS>PARENTS
upon me as one of their *indispensable maids*, and I said	TEACHERS = MAIDS
"I'm a daycare worker," I would have a very different	DEMEANING
feeling about daycare. I'm not so sure that I'd be thinking	
about going back to school to get an M.S.W. I might be	
thinking about going back to school to study . . . , to do	RETENTION
more child development kinds of stuff. . . .	EDUCATION

I work for people who make more money — even the *D.S.S. people**, even our Title XX kids,* even the parents of the majority of the Title XX kids are making more money than I am. And *I'm* making more money than most people in day care in Greater Boston. Our salaries are higher than most.

POORER THAN POOR, BUT BETTER OFF THAN MOST CC WORKERS

[80] But I'm 42 years old and I'm making $7.50 an hour.

AGE : INCOME

---

* Low income families in this state received child care reimbursements from the Department of Social Services, Title XX. By affirmative action on the part of the center, one third of their families received such reimbursement.

COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

Geertz argues that analysis depends upon our sifting through the mental constructions of the people we study.

> [W]hat we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to. . . . Most of what we need to comprehend . . . is insinuated as background information before the thing itself is directly examined. . . . Right down at the factual base, the hard rock, insofar as there is any, of the whole enterprise, we are already explicating: and worse, explicating explications.
>
> Analysis then, is sorting out the structures of signification . . . and determining their social ground and import. . . . What the ethnographer is in fact faced with . . . is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures . . . which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render. (1973, pp. 9-10)

This description captures nicely the process I tried to use to analyze the interviews.

In retrospect, the method of this study was highly appropriate and productive. The main themes that emerged fell rather elegantly into categories of job satisfactions and dissatisfactions, and are discussed and analyzed in the next two chapters. The remainder of the study pursues and interprets these findings in their social and cultural contexts.

Notes to Chapter 2

[1] Both of these factors appear to exert a strong influence on job satisfaction.

[2] The Working Conditions Project findings were questioned on the grounds that the validity of the findings might be limited to Washtenaw County. By including other geographic areas, I hoped to gain credibility for the study's findings. As it turned out, this decision was critical to my understanding.

[3] The following Informed Consent statement was signed by each respondent after I read it aloud with them and answered any questions. They were given a copy.

INFORMED CONSENT - CHILD CARE AS AN OCCUPATION STUDY

You are invited to participate in a study of child care givers' attitudes about their work, and what leads them to stay in child care or leave it. Information will be gathered in one or two interviews. The interview should last for about 1 1/2 hours.

This information will be used to help child care administrators and advocates improve the worklife of child care givers. The study is part of a doctoral dissertation at the University of Michigan School of Education. To discuss any questions or concerns you may write or call: Kathy Modigliani, 1616 Lincoln, Ann Arbor, MI 48104; (313) 769-9770.

A am going to read you the following statement and ask you if you agree to each part:

> I understand that our conversation will be entirely confidential, and that my identity will never be revealed. Any information from my interview to be used in written or oral presentations will be disguised so that I can not be identified.
>
> I agree to be tape recorded by Kathy Modigliani for her research analysis. I understand that I can turn the tape recorder off at any time. I understand that the tape will not be labeled with my name, and that it will be heard by no one except Kathy Modigliani and her research advisors, unless I later give my specific permission of a segment of the tape to be played during a presentation.
>
> I understand that I can ask that any part of the interview not be discussed in the research reports. Otherwise, written quotes from my interview may be used in reports of the study so long as identifying characteristics are removed.
>
> I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I do not have to answer any question; I understand that I may stop the interview at any time.

------------------------ (signed)

------------ (date)

[4] Following are the conventions that were used in transcribing the interviews:

- Make changes necessary to protect confidentiality but retain essential information.

- Omit routine "ums" and other conversation fillers; use ellipses to denote pauses.
- Add implied transitions and fill in missing referents (e.g., change "next door" to "the pastor's office;" change "WCAEYC" to "the county Association for the Education of Young Children.")
- Note any laughter, tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, or other non-verbal communication (laughed out loud; shook head "no).
- Include the tape counter number periodically for future reference.

CHAPTER 3

THE SATISFACTIONS OF CHILD CARE AS WORK

THE TOUGHEST JOB YOU'LL EVER LOVE

Considering the low income, lack of benefits, and low status of child care as work, why *would* anyone do this work? The answer emerges directly and forcefully from almost every interview: because it is highly rewarding and satisfying to do so. This chapter takes a close look at the passions and pleasures of child care as work.

Job satisfaction is not a simple emotion. People seem to average out their feelings about many different aspects of their work — which may range from highly negative to highly positive — into one overall assessment of their satisfaction with their jobs. Before we look at the pleasures and frustrations of child care workers, it is helpful to understand the multidimensional nature of this phenomenon.

The Multidimensionality of Job Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

> This job is more like the Peace Corps than the Peace Corps was. The ads say "It's the toughest job you'll ever love." When I was in the Peace Corps, that felt real true. But now I know that it's day care that's the toughest job I'll ever love.

Jane, a teacher of toddlers, loves her job even though it's tough, or maybe in part because it is tough. She loves her job — but as will be seen in the next paragraph, she will probably leave it before long. After giving a glowing report about what she likes about her work, Jane added that her salary is going to drive her away from child care because she is tired of not having a car and feeling like "an underclass citizen."

The theme "I love my job but I'm about to leave it" was expressed clearly and directly by that more than half the interviewed providers, teachers, and directors. The Michigan Survey showed that 95% of teachers and directors liked their jobs, but only 36% expected to stay in them for the next two years. What does this mean? Why would someone leave a job she loves? Returning to the interview quoted above, Jane speaks for many child care workers as she explores the contradictions she feels about her job as the head teacher of a group of toddlers:

> I love my job. It's real challenging work — work that matters. It's challenging because physically and emotionally it demands a lot. I go home really tired every night. You give a lot. The thing that counts, that makes you stay with it, is that you get a lot in return. It's not just challenging, it's rewarding. When I see a child make some progress, overcome a problem, I get an incredible sense of success. I know it's their success, but I feel successful when they succeed. Teaching two-year-olds is creative. It's *real*. It's work that matters. . . .
>
> It shouldn't be this way, but I feel day care teachers don't get the respect they deserve. One of the main factors is our income. It's not a living wage. That shouldn't be, because we work really hard and we're doing important work. . . .
>
> I feel somewhat like an underclass citizen. I'm tired of not having a car. . . . If I made a dollar more an hour, I could afford a car. . . . Last year [1987] I made under $10,000 working full time. I'm not a money grubber. What I go for is work that matters to me. . . .
>
> I'm not satisfied with my salary. That's what's going to drive me out. Nobody can last on this, unless I was married to a lawyer. I give up a lot of things to work here. I do it willingly, but the longer I do it, the less happy I am about it.

Jane began her interview by saying that she loves her job. We might guess that if she were asked on a questionnaire whether or not she likes her job, she would check "agree," or even "strongly agree." People adapt to the reality of their situations, and tend to report that they are satisfied to simple questions to that effect.

But as she explores the breadth and depth of her feelings, some rather strong dissatisfactions emerged. Was she less than honest with herself or me when she said she loves her job? To the contrary, a further analysis of her interview shows that she really does feel *both* highly satisfied and highly dissatisfied, at the same time. This paradox, this apparent contradiction, was confirmed by interview after interview.

It would be misleading to say that Jane is "moderately satisfied" with her job. It is not as if her feelings get homogenized into one overall feeling. She loves her job *and* is frustrated by it, simultaneously. The tension she feels between these positive and negative aspects of her work makes her unsure how much longer she will stay at it — maybe she will weather the problems for some time because the satisfactions will continue to outweigh the dissatisfactions, or because of inertia. Or maybe something will push her over the edge, and she'll quit within the next few weeks, as several of my interviewees did.

Jane spends a lot of time mulling over what she wants to do next. When she does leave, will she be able to find a better-paying job where she can remain with her chosen occupation — that of teaching young children? Or will she have to switch to being an administrator, or an adult educator, or an advocate? In any case, even though she appears to be an excellent teacher and loves teaching, she will most likely stop working with children before long. Statistically, she is likely to leave the field altogether.

Tensions between rewarding highs and frustrating lows — in varying proportions — characterize the attitudes of most of the providers, teachers, and directors I interviewed. The interviews confirmed and extended the impression from the survey data that job satisfaction is not unidimensional. Aggregated, statistical findings — "Ninty-five percent of child care center staff members are satisfied with their jobs" — are misleading in this multidimensional and conflicted area. Like Jane, most of these workers have not resolved their likes and dislikes into a simple, consistent, and unambivalent feeling. Instead, when they talk about their jobs they often rave ecstatically *and* complain bitterly in the same breath.

Survey research can begin to capture such multidimensionality and complexity through open-ended questions. The Michigan survey asked teachers and directors whether they expected to be in the field in two years or not; the next question asked them to list a few reasons why. Following are but a few of the many conflicted answers of those who were unsure, reported in full, that express the conflict "Love It *and* Leave It" in little nutshell sentences:

> This is my love, where my training and experience is and where I'm effective. However— the salary is not adequate.
>
> The work we do is so important, but most of my acquaintances regard me as a baby-sitter, and don't understand the skills necessary to do my job well.
>
> My center pays more than others but it is still not enough.
>
> I may need to get a higher paying job. I enjoy working with young children but I am not sure I want to make a career out of it.
>
> I love children, but it's hard to be with them for 40 hours a week with no breaks.
>
> If I can change jobs and improve my salary and receive benefits I would like to stay in the field. Otherwise, I must look elsewhere. . . .

> I love working with kids, but not the lack of professional recognition. An elementary school teacher is considered a professional — a day care teacher doesn't share the same status.

From these and the other answers it is clear that, although they like their work, the low wages, low status, and strenuous working conditions make it very difficult for many early childhood people to stay in the field. While 95% of all respondents liked their jobs, only 36% felt their salaries were adequate. And only 36% expected to be at their centers two years later.

The Realms of Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

Across all the different kinds of early care and education workers — home- or center-based, young or old, urban or rural, living in poverty or comfort, without a high school diploma or with a master's degree — remarkable consistencies emerged about *what* characteristics of the work satisfy and dissatisfy people in this field. Good child care workers tend to like or love the day-to-day content of their work, and simultaneously they tend to be frustrated by their compensation and the low prestige society gives to their occupation.

Several researchers have postulated that the various facets of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction can be categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic domains (Hall, 1986; Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1959; Veroff, Douvan & Kulka, 1981). Intrinsic facets are those originating from the work itself, such as feelings of achievement and competence. Extrinsic facets are those originating outside the work, such as feelings about the job's pay and social status.

The intrinsic-extrinsic dichotomy highlights three interesting findings of this analysis. First, child care workers' satisfactions tend to fall quite neatly into the intrinsic categories — characteristics of the work itself, and their dissatisfactions tend to be extrinsic — characteristic of factors external to the work such as pay and social status. This pattern exists to some extent in all types of work, but it is especially true in early care and education.

Second, the intrinsic-extrinsic categorization is useful for taking another look at the results of peoples' answers to a simple agree-or-disagree question about job satisfaction. I think people tend to interpret this question as asking whether or not they like the intrinsic content of their work. In other words, it would not be contradictory to say "I love my job and I hate its salary." Thus it is not a paradox when early childhood people say "I love my job and I'm going to leave it."

Third, the majority of interviewees followed a common pattern. They began by talking about how they felt about the intrinsic (and positive) aspects of their work. For the first 10 to 20 minutes they told fairly rosy stories. Then, after they had clearly expressed their positive feelings, many said they didn't know how much longer they'd be able to live on their incomes. Their impatience with not owning a car, or having to live with roommates or grandparents, or whatever, was causing them to think about getting another job or going back to school. Finally, toward the end to the interviews, they would get around to expressing their frustration with the lack of respect for their work.

It was striking, for many of the interviewees, how separate their satisfactions were from their dissatisfactions. Respondents' often-passionate likes and dislikes co-habited side by side, not integrated, in the space of people's worklives. Although people might talk about their satisfactions on the one hand and their dissatisfactions on the other in the same breath, there was a feeling of leaping from the one to the other. An underlying tension was created by these conflicting feelings.

Other interviewees weighed the pros and cons of their jobs and tried to resolve the conflict. Sonia sounds as if she has resolved the contradictions:

> When I say "I teach kindergarten," people say, "Oh really, where?" I say [the name of my child care chain], and they kind of look at me. It doesn't bother me because I know I'm teaching, I'm not just baby-sitting. A lot of people are still into the frame of mind that day care is just baby-sitting.
>
> I've done lots of different things before. I've sold Tupperware, I've worked in a janitorial service. When you find something that you're satisfied with, that you can feel the joy, see the enthusiasm on the children's face, it's worth a whole lot more than being able to say "I'm a computer technician."

While there is a multidimensional quality to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, the two realms are separate, at least for most child care workers. Rather than being polar opposite ends of one scale, they exist as two separate clusters of attitudes.

This complex experience of the phenomenon we call job satisfaction is described by Hochschild's theory of emotions postulated in *The Managed Heart* (1983). Emotions are compound, composed of many facets. People do not experience all facets simultaneously, but move serially from one facet to another. We are also able to focus on one facet in light of another, while the remaining facets compose the background context. In this chapter and the next, we will see that is exactly the way the interviewees talk about job satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

Because most of the workers experienced a bifurcation of feelings in this area, it makes sense to discuss them separately. This chapter delineates the satisfactions of early care and education as work. Chapter 4 delineates the dissatisfactions.

The Satisfactions of Child Care Workers

Pleasure in being with children is a theme that emerged from almost every interview. Most of these people really like working with kids, although as will be discussed, two of them probably never enjoyed children very much, and a few more seem to have lost their enjoyment or "burned out." Most of the child care workers I have known in various contexts have genuinely appreciated children.

Of course child care workers enjoy working with children. Why else would somebody choose this work? Not for the money, nor the prestige, nor the ease of the workload.

What do they like about working with children? The stories of these 28 people show common themes with individual variations. The strongest theme is satisfaction from helping children grow and learn. But *what* they like to help children learn varies with each individual's values and priorities.

Most of these people like being with children, but when they talk about *why*, the reasons also vary.

This section begins with the satisfactions most strongly expressed by the interviewees and gradually moves to the less common ones. In order of decreasing overall importance these satisfaction themes are:

- Helping Young Children Grow and Learn
- Being of Service — Doing Work That Matters
- Appreciation of Young Children
- Challenging Work
- Relationships With Staff

- Relationships With Parents
- Natural Mothers
- Personal Growth
- Autonomy, Responsibility, and Power

Helping Young Children Grow and Learn

Many of these people, whether they work in child care homes or centers, are true teachers. Whether they had "always been good with children" (as many claimed to be), whether their approach had been enhanced or misguided by education, or whether they had observed others who were gifted in interacting with children, teaching seems to have come naturally to them. Stacy, a family child care provider, showed her natural teaching ability through her casual interactions with the children as we talked in her living room. One child, perhaps three years old, coming from the bathroom, asked her to button his pants. Without pausing in her conversation, she patiently held the waist of his pants together so that he could push the button through. An ideally educational act of teaching — she understood what the child could do for himself, and what help he needed. Judging by the unbroken flow of her conversation, she didn't have to deliberate about it. She was motivated to do right by the child and knew immediately what to do, as she did in many other teachable moments during our morning together. The best early childhood teachers, whether in homes or centers, know how to support children's learning without being didactic.

Many of these people are gifted teachers and are highly gratified when children respond to their teaching, however formal or informal. Several mentioned that in this work you get to see progress every day as the children learn and develop before your eyes.

There is a wide range of individual difference in *what* the interviewees care about teaching the children. Some tend to focus on children's emotional well-being, some on the social relations of the group, some on cognitive skills and problem solving. Others have specific areas of development they care most about. But no matter *what* they care about teaching, these dedicated workers put their hearts into their work. Here are a few examples.

Emotional Well-Being. The first type of teacher focuses on children's psychological development. Keisha summed up this perspective: If they're happy, I'm happy. Annie, a teacher of 3- to 5-year olds, went further. Her greatest interest was in developing what she called "healthy egos," in making therapeutic responses to children's needs. In answer to the question about something she did recently that made her glad she was doing this work, she told the following story:

> My co-teacher is into pre-reading and pre-math and pre- pre- pre-. I don't care about those things. I care about how kids feel about themselves. I care about kids knowing how to take care of themselves if somebody hits them, to know how to walk up to someone and say, "Stop. Don't *do* that to me." I'm more interested in helping kids develop healthy egos. I feel they're ready for a challenge in climbing. They are ready to get their egos together. A sense of pride could come from mastering a hammer.
>
> One morning Maia's mother said that Maia was going to another child's house that afternoon. She does not do that, *ever*. I could tell she was really upset about it. After her mother left, she stood on the table. I had some rice and some pouring stuff out for kids, and she tipped the thing and the rice went all over the floor. Instead of yelling at her, I asked her if she was worried about going to Sara's house. She burst out crying! She said "I don't know what Sara's house looks like." So we sat down. I actually do know what Sara's house looks like —

> I'd been there for a parent conference — and so we talked about it. I said that if she was feeling worried during the day, that tipping the rice over made it harder because then it made me angry, and she didn't get to talk about being worried. Maybe she could just come up and say "I'm worried," or "I have that worried feeling." And she did, a couple times that day, and it just made me feel fantastic. It excited me. The talk with her and her response later in the day. That's what makes me feel good about being a teacher.
>
> Part of my excitement was that I made a therapeutic response to her. My interest is there, as opposed to sound blending — that's what I care about. I mean, Maia's not going to do sound blending if she's so tense she's dumping rice on the floor.

An infant teacher told this story in response to the same question:

> I had one little guy who just had a hard time taking to the bottle. He was a breast-fed child. He would not take a bottle, even at home. His mother worked half-time at first, so she came in at noon to nurse him. We tried with water, breast milk, formula, different nipples. We tried everything. About the time we were ready to give this up, I put his blanket over his head. It worked [she laughed]. It must have been either the smell of the blanket or not being able to see my face. This happened the week before the mother had to go to work full time, so she was pretty concerned about it. So that made her happy, and the child is happy as a clam. It's very encouraging to be able to come over a problem and solve it. It made a nice experience.

One provider described with great satisfaction how a child, who was extremely withdrawn when she first came into child care, learned to cuddle and eat well. "Seeing her come around, that was wonderful."

Social Relations. Stacy, the family child care provider who helped the boy button his pants, obviously cared about teaching children to help themselves and be independent. She also wanted them to learn how to say what was on their minds. She spoke proudly of the way she encourages very young children to express themselves with a puppet, "Rabbit":

> Do you use puppets with children? It's amazing how they will talk to Rabbit — things they'd never say to me. You'd think they'd know the puppet is me, but they'll just bleed their little hearts out to it.

Another provider worked hard to help her five children, ranging in age from a few months to five years, get along well together. When asked to tell about something that happened recently that made her glad she was doing this work, Michele glowed as she told the following story:

> I was getting lunch ready the other day, and I heard Jimmy giggle. I looked around and Annie was playing peek-a-boo with him. All the other kids were playing and getting on well together. They are so close to each other, it's like one big happy family. I feel I'm giving them something great, that they would not have except for me. I feel like there is some goodness in this world and I am part of it.

Another provider said that it was especially important to her to teach the children to get along well together because, since she had had to raise her younger siblings while her mother was working, she wanted her home to create the family that she never had.

Cognitive Learning and Problem Solving. Tom recalled a recent time he enjoyed. He had been reading a book to 4- and 5- year olds and trying to explain the author's use of symbols. A little later in the story, one child stopped him to ask "Do you think the guy that wrote this *meant* to do that?" "They were *getting* it!" said Tom. "They were leading. They thought of things I never would have thought of."

Sonia, who had no coursework in early childhood education, had worked her way from assistant to head kindergarten teacher of a franchised center that offered a particularly commodified form of child care. She described proudly her highly structured curriculum:

> When I did my MRTs [a readiness/achievement test she had administered to her kindergarteners at the end of the year], it that showed me that my goals for kindergarten could be carried out, and the enthusiasm that the children have for learning. The child who goes home and talks to his parents about bicuspids — that makes it all worthwhile.

When untrained caregivers try to offer an educational program, they usually foster care that is inappropriate for the children's interests or ability level.

Daily Living Competencies. The final form of satisfaction identified among the interviewees is that of helping children with the basic functions of daily life. The younger the children, the more teachers tended to focus on every-day competencies — eating, sleeping, toileting, dressing themselves. One provider had her own pet project:

> I work real hard on table manners. Saying "please" is something they can learn to say right when they're learning to talk. You teach them to say "nose." Why not "please"? I make a comment on what they do. "Where does your food go?" They know. If they put their hand in their cup, I remove it. I take the cup away for a few seconds, then give it back and explain. Everyone sits at the table until everyone is finished. The parents like that they know how to behave.

Being of Service — Doing Work That Matters

Central to the job satisfaction of some of the interviewees, and secondarily important to almost everyone, was the opportunity early care and education offered to do something meaningful with their worklives. Most of these people gain a sense of accomplishing something important when they help children grow and learn. As Jane said, "I love it here. It's real challenging work — work that matters. That's what I like about day care."

Why does this work matter? For some, raising the next generation is a way of doing something meaningful with their lives, as opposed to piling up widgets. Being part of the solution. Others seem to feel a moral imperative to be of service. They may see their jobs as service to children and families, a religious mission, or politically important work. (It should be noted that the theme of service is not reported by many studies of job satisfaction; it is probably especially common in early care and education, but experienced by other workers more than has been recognized.)

The Importance of Raising Children. Jane's satisfaction in helping children become successful at basic developmental tasks was shared by many. Another teacher said "It's hard work, yes it is. But if you love it, it's so beautiful to help to mold the personality and life of a child."

Several people I interviewed came to early care and education from other occupations where they had been more highly paid, because they were not fulfilled in those jobs. One family child care provider gave the following explanation for her choice of child care over her previous and more lucrative work of hanging wallpaper.

> I'll probably keep doing this as long as I work. I feel that I'm doing something productive. I enjoy it. Its important how a child is treated in the first few years of their life. It will affect the rest of their life. For many parents who work, I

> don't think they realize how important children are to the next generation. What will happen around here in the future depends on how these kids turn out. I think one of the most important jobs there is, is raising children.

A teacher who had studied graphic arts found child care more satisfying:

> Now I feel good about myself. I found something I really love. I know day care don't pay very much. But I think what will Jason do today if I'm not there. I have two kids of my own, but I have many more here. I take it home. What does this child need? What must I do. I don't put the problem on the child. When you got a child that's having problems, something needs to happen. It's worth all the money in the world to me to see a child's problem turned around.
>
> I go home with stains on my clothes and googobs in my pockets. I know people have negative thoughts. People at church think I'm out of my mind to work with children all week long and then come in to teach Sunday school. I do it because I love to do it.

One provider who usually cares for extremely low-income children also serves her community as an informal, unpaid foster parent. She has taken several children in for extended periods of time. She explained one case this way:

> My oldest son had a friend whose girlfriend had a baby, their senior year in high school. When the baby was 6 months old, the mother was killed in a car wreck. The daddy was a very irresponsible boy, and he couldn't get along with his parents. My son got me to take the baby. We took him in and we kept him until he was 18 months old, night and day.

Another provider wanted to protect children from the adult world.

> I sort of feel a mission. There's this wonderful child consciousness, a lot of creativity and beauty and spontaneity, and it gets dominated by the adult world. I want to help them maintain that childlike quality.

Service to a Cause. At least a third of the people I interviewed talked about their work in child care as an opportunity to serve a cause of some kind. The causes they want to serve vary almost as much as the content they want to teach. For some the cause is simply to help little children, "among the neediest of all people" said one. Or to contribute to the next generation. Many of these women and men feel that our society undervalues the importance of raising children well, and that they are doing something important, even though it is not recognized as such. Bruce wanted his work to contribute to the well-being of his society:

> I have a philosophical commitment to working with people. That's the way that I see I can influence people in their development, so that ultimately they're a positive addition to our society.
>
> If you help a child develop a real positive sense of self, they will go into whatever endeavor they choose and do a good job. That creates a healthy society. I would like my country to be a healthy country. To be healthy there have to be healthy people living in it. I think early childhood is a significant time for developing healthy people.

Keisha said:

> So many kids are in situations were their parents are on drugs, or their father doesn't talk to their mother. They're so messed up, and I'm really concerned about where our world is going. My parents did everything for me.

Some providers feel gratified to be able to support working parents. This form of service will be discussed in the upcoming theme, Relationships With Parents. Several of the directors cared at least as much about helping parents as helping children. One director said that the main reason she stayed at her community college child care center was the parents. "Seeing them get through school. They are so stressed. Seeing them graduate. That's what keeps me going." She said she felt that directing the child care center is performing a service for her community.

Religious Service. Several Atlanta interviewees saw taking care of children as a way of serving Christ. This was the only regional difference in satisfaction that emerged from the study. Although workers in Michigan, Seattle, and Boston were nearly as likely as those from Atlanta to talk about their sense of mission or service to a cause — no one from these other three regions mentioned an explicitly religious context. Perhaps some of them experienced religious meaning in their work, but found it less culturally acceptable to talk about it. To the contrary, one director felt such a sentiment was exploited: "The churches and social service agencies don't care about us as people. They push heavily on the idea that you are doing a service and you are supposed to do it because you believe in it. It's considered crass to talk about money, or not wanting to stay late."

One Atlanta director described how she came to her present job:

> I've been in day care for the last 15 years, and in preschool education for the last 38 years. My church wanted me to start a center, because we feel very strongly that the churches are the ones who would best pick up the slack in day care if the government isn't doing it. We have the facilities, and on the whole (I'm prejudiced I guess), church-oriented day care tends to be a bit better in quality. We're different from the for-profits, but we have no voice in the state legislature. So we try to organize the church day care centers into a cohesive group, so we can support each other. I do advocacy consulting with other churches on how to start centers.

Carol spoke of her work as a church ministry:

> I like the ministry of day care. I like the way people here are with each other. The parents feel blessed to have their children here. It was a big deal for those parents. They might not have food or clothing, but those kids were getting so much love.
>
> I started at $4.00 an hour, which wasn't much, but this is a church and I'm not exactly hungry. The church helps as much as they can.
>
> My grandparents think I'm not making enough money. But I tell them I believe that I'm doing the Lord's work. It's what I feel good about. I take the kids on nature walks. Talk to them about the things the Lord has blessed us with. The trees, the breeze, the beautiful birds. You know, I'm doing something I like. Love. I like my shoes, I love my work.

As will be seen in the chapter on compensation, other teachers echo the sentiment that money is not as important to them as doing work that matters.

Political Work. Although no one actually used the term "politically correct" to describe the way they felt about their work, three interviewees said that their attitudes were strongly influenced by the politics of the 60's, and several others implied it. Clearly they chose their work as a means to "becoming part of the solution (to the problems of today's society) rather than part of the problem" — a 60's value that was replaced by a very different set of values during the Reagan years.

For some men and women, child care is a feminist job. Caring for and educating children is a way of supporting the women's movement and/or the American family under siege. Barry, influenced by the 60's to want to do socially important work, was influenced by feminism to feel that it was important for men to work in child care. His first job, in the early 70s, was especially satisfying at the beginning:

> I loved that job. The center was publicly supported, in a housing project. The families were all Black, mostly single parents. You felt like the mission of what your were doing was pretty clear — creating a good nurturing environment for the kids and also making opportunities for their mothers. That's what was political about it.
>
> Then there were rounds of budget cuts. Everybody was making $3.00 an hour and we never had as much staff as we needed. The program was suffering, the kids weren't getting what they should have. I started feeling I was greasing the wheels of a lousy social service system. This thing wasn't well funded enough to be doing what it was supposed to be doing.

After a few years away from child care, Barry had become a center director by the time of our interview. Now his political concerns included paying teachers a living wage, and he was trapped in a no-win situation:

> I've gotten to the point in this job that we've raised the salaries and staffing, but now we've raised parents' fees high enough so that the socio-economic mix of our center has deteriorated. So it makes me want to explore the part of the child care world that operates on public funds. The amount the state spends on child care has gone down 25%. A lot of the state-supported kids are in minimal custodial centers with no resources, and I'd probably be upset at the conditions in the centers, and yet I'm drawn to them. But I'm feeling like those kids are rotting away and there's more that needs to be done in those programs than in programs like the one I'm working in.

Soon after our interview, he left the center for a child care advocacy job.

Cindy said:

> To make the world better, you start with children. Help them feel good about themselves, nurture them, educate them. You have to understand how their parents and the community influence their lives. You have to work with all parts of their lives. I'm a feminist, and I understand the relation between women and children and society.

Martin Luther King gave eloquent voice to the conception of work as an opportunity for service. In his last speech, he said that on the day of his eulogy he would not want to be remembered for his Nobel Peace Prize or other tributes of fame. Instead, he said,

> I'd like somebody to mention, that day, that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to give his life serving others. That I did try to feed the hungry. That I did try, in my life, to clothe those who were naked. I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity. (Audio tape recorded from television, April 3, 1968)

Many of these child care workers are trying, in their own humble ways, to love and serve humanity. In looking at the whole group of interviewees, I am struck that these people, by choosing to perform work that helps others, even though it requires financial loss, stand in contrast to most of their peers in Reagan-Bush America. Why do some people choose to endure hardship in order to meet some ideal or commitment? In later chapters we will return to this topic.

Appreciation of Young Children

In addition to the satisfaction of helping children grow and learn, most interviewees simply like young children and appreciate being with them. Here are some of the adjectives they used to describe them:

- lovable
- funny, fun
- interesting, fascinating
- spontaneous
- creative, imaginative
- honest
- enthusiastic, joyous
- educational, growth-inducing
- innocent, untainted
- maddening, real bad
- exhausting

A few examples illustrate the depth of these feelings.

Kids are Lovable. Michele's attachment to the children was the source of great satisfaction and also distress.

> We might move this summer. That's going to be very difficult for me. I'll stay in touch with some of these parents forever. Just because I'm done watching the children, doesn't mean that they're gone from my life. That is hard. I may be gone from the child's memory, but I'm somewhere there. To think that it might be the last time I might see one of these children, that really bothers me. They are their mom and dads' babies but *they're my babies too.* I wonder who's going to have them. It's hard for me to come to grips with leaving them, so I don't think about it.

Kids are Fun and Funny. Many caregiver-teachers found delight in the spontaneous, creative, joyous little moments that came along every day in their work. Many found children's imaginations charming and genuinely delighted in their senses of humor. Stacy chuckled, "Kids are entertaining. If they were up now, they'd be out here entertaining us." Shannon said, "They'll do something to make you laugh. It makes you laugh so hard you start crying." She gave two examples. One was a toddler who, in trying to get her attention, took her face in his two hands and turned it toward him. The other was a 3-year-old who had some off-limits fast-food french fries in his lunch, and offered her one surreptitiously, saying with a grin, "Don't tell."

Molly recalled, laughing

> In what other job could I get paid for having this much fun? Yesterday I had the privilege of sharing the beautiful fall day with my group — walking in the woods, collecting leaves, playing in a haystack, and bobbing for apples. It might not be everybody's cup of tea, but I have *fun* chasing kids, pretending I'm a not-too-scary monster. And I just love our story time, right before rest time. My job is a lot of fun when I do it right: if I work well with the difficult children and make sure there are good activities. . . .
>
> Sometimes the kids crack me up. One day, late in the morning, Chloe was bounding out the door on her way to the playground. She saw the moon,

> stopped in her tracks, put one hand on her hip and shook the other finger: "Mr. Moon! What are you doing out of bed. Now you get back in your bed this minute, young man!"
>
> I also chuckle every time I remember David saying that a blue spruce was "a foggy tree."

Kids are Interesting. Several people talked about kids as interesting or fascinating. Again I was struck that you don't often hear people talk like that outside early childhood circles. People talked about how exciting it was to come to understand how children of different ages think, or see the world. One teacher said "You have to figure out what's really basic if you work with 4-year olds. Once you really understand them, you understand most everything else."

Variation on the Theme: Kids are Frustrating. As will be seen in the next chapter, two teachers talked about dissatisfactions related to children. One provider did not seem to be enjoying the children, even though she did not admit it to me or apparently herself. It was her own children who seemed to frustrate her the most.

In-depth interviewing as well as survey research is vulnerable to a social acceptability bias. No doubt some of these people felt frustrations and dissatisfactions in their interactions with children that they avoided mentioning in their interviews.

But most of the time, I believe, they do enjoy simply *being* with young children. Perhaps it is no surprise that these interviewees, who were identified as "good" early childhood workers, would express strong appreciation of young children. The same sentiment was echoed across the full range of teachers and directors in the Michigan survey. An unheard-of 99% of all center teachers and directors said they liked working with young children.

Again, there are not a lot of other rewards in this work. For most of the interviewees, their appreciation of children and teaching was a dividend that made them stick to this work rather than move on to some better paying or easier job. Appreciation of young children was what drew even those with few job options to child care rather than their perceived alternatives such as store clerk, domestic worker, or fast food worker.

For a few of the people I talked to, working with young children offered an alternative to the adult world. Two said explicitly that they preferred the company of young children to that of adults. One of them felt that children are honest, but you can't trust adults. The other did not like to "have to get dressed and go out and deal with the public."

Challenging Work

The survey analysis indicated that, of all the aspects of job satisfaction, intellectual challenge was correlated most highly with overall liking of one's job and feeling committed to one's center. The interviews confirmed that many child care workers do indeed feel intellectually challenged by their work. These stories contradict the going image of caregivers as custodial babysitters.

Interviewees who had early childhood education or child development coursework were particularly likely to describe the intellectual challenges they find in their work. So were college graduates who had come to child care from other fields, who were aware of the challenge and importance of this work in contrast to their earlier jobs. The increased intellectual challenge of the work for people who have studied in the field seems to contribute to increased job satisfaction, which in turn builds commitment to their jobs and to the field.

One director, Barry, who had come to the field in his late 20s in a career change, described his discovery of child care's challenge:

> As soon as I started teaching, I saw that it was actually interesting from a lot of points of view. I still feel that way about day care. There's a lot of levels happening at the same time. There's the kids, and that's fascinating. Then there's the parents. And there's the teachers, and the program — what you actually do.
>
> When I took this job, it was challenging to get the place going better. I like administration. Working together with people to get done what needs to be done, on a shoestring, of course. It's creative. It's very challenging problem-solving. And it's solving problems that matter, unlike in my last job.

Interviewees mentioned that they never get bored because no two days are the same, no two children are the same, and you cannot predict what little children are going to do. Rosie, once a center teacher, now a family child care provider, said she doesn't get bored because her work

> has so many facets. There are so many different pieces to be expert at. Talking to parents, supporting them as well as the kids. Instead of just being a teacher, now I'm a whole different kind of caregiver, pioneering a role, which is attractive to me. I can use different talents. Each year I have gone to a younger age of kids.

She also described the challenge of an earlier center job:

> They needed an extra kindergarten teacher because they had a few too many children. They picked out their worst ten kindergartners and gave them to me. At that time I thought I might be interested in dealing with kids with behavior disorders because it was such a challenge. And I *loved* finding ways that got them motivated to do things. I got exposed to kids and got a chance to try out a lot of my theories. So I did that for two years.

In spite of the challenge more highly educated workers feel, they are more likely to be dissatisfied with their salaries, as will be seen in the next chapter.

Relationships With Staff

We saw that people in child care almost always enjoy their relationships with children. Relationships with co-workers and parents are also important satisfactions for some caregivers. An in-depth survey of job satisfaction among a cross-section of U.S. workers showed that, compared to men, "women were much more likely to report satisfaction from social affiliations; they were also much more likely to mention satisfaction from working with particular individuals." (Douvan, 1982, p. 5)

For a few center-based staff, their relations with co-workers was just as important as their relations with children, or more important. In all such cases, they worked in centers where the staff was a close, cohesive group. Some had worked together for several years and socialized with each other outside work. Some of these workers were so highly committed to their centers that they do not plan to leave them as long as they stay in child care. One respondent answered the survey question about why she expected to stay in her center for at least two more years by explaining that: "My closest and most meaningful personal relationships are with the staff, children, and parents at our center." Others speak of their staff as extended family.

Just as the principal sets the social tone for a school, the director sets the tone for a center. Doing this hard work together can build strong bonds. Working together against the odds can strengthen the bonds. One teacher said about her director

> She was such a *prize* to work with. She had such high values. She was a quality teacher herself and she was a quality director. She respected people in a way that I was struggling to do, so she was a great model.

Several of the directors interviewed went to great lengths to meet the needs of their staffs as well as the children and their families. Cindy summarized her philosophy of management on a low budget:

> I use reciprocity. Someone can take time off to go to the dentist or get their car fixed. They work overtime if someone is late. I don't have to ask.
>
> It is my job to meet the needs of the staff so that the staff can meet the needs of the children. I am a social worker, a banker — I've given them loans. I got a bicycle for the center when I realized how often our cars were broken down.
>
> How to keep people in a program, if you can't pay them $10 an hour — what else do they need? Friendship needs, extended family. I have those needs too. And run a program that is good for kids. Staff have stayed here 3, 5, 10, 12 years. People want to participate in decision making, have say so. The vehicles for communication are everywhere here, for parents too. It's a real open program all the time.

Both teachers I interviewed in the center where Mrs. Carlisle was director said they would stay at the center as long as she stayed as director. They said they felt like family. One example of the practices that built such loyalty was the story of the Thanksgiving paychecks. The church bookkeeper, who liked to run a tight ship, refused to give teachers their paychecks on Wednesday instead of Friday of Thanksgiving week. Mrs. Carlisle, knowing the checks would influence the quality of her staff's holiday, took it upon herself to get the checks out on Wednesday "even if I'd be fired". She realized that the same thing would happen at Christmas, and announced that if they wouldn't issue the checks early, she would "start looking for another job."

In contrast, at another center (not in this study), the two administrators hardly communicated with the teachers at all. Their offices were physically removed from the center in another part of the larger institution that sponsored the program. Neither administrator knew very much about the daily happenings of child care. Hard feelings were contagious. The teachers put a great deal of energy into gossip-laden griping about the administration and other teachers. An example of the lack of communication was that the staff learned they were about to get a new, despised director by finding in a copy machine the original of a letter announcing the change to parents.

Other Early Childhood Professionals. Many of the center staff I talked to felt a strong bond to other workers in their profession. One director said she didn't know what she would do without their campus child care network. Another said she loved going to her state's annual meetings.

For some, the field of early childhood stands in contrast to other occupations. Barry especially liked the annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

> It's exciting to go to NAEYC, and meet people from around the country who are all involved in the same thing — it has some of the excitement of the movement of the 60s.

Molly said

> I love the people who are in early childhood. They're another reason I've stayed with child care. They're playful, they're caring, they're creative. They want to make the world a better place. So they're my kind of people. When I'm sitting at staff meeting, or at our county child care meetings, I look around and I love the people I see. I don't think I'd feel that way in most jobs.

> I think there are many of us who came to this work, or stay with it, because we were drawn to the lifestyle. The philosophy. Dewey's ideas about how people learn best, I think, apply to all ages. Creative play in a rich, supportive environment is also good for older children and adults, too. But preschool is where you are allowed to teach that way. At many times in my career I've thought about applying for a public school job, but I don't think I'd like the kind of rigid curriculum I would be expected to teach.

Across the country, provider associations and support groups are particularly important to some family child care providers to prevent them from being isolated from others doing the same kind of work. Three of the interviewed providers mentioned such groups. Trudy especially felt the support she received from her colleagues there counteracted the disapproval she felt from her friends toward her work.

Relationships With Parents

Some family child care providers are very close to the parents of the children in their care; others have more perfunctory relationships. Close relations with parents partially mitigate the isolation from other adults that can make this lonely work. In one case, the provider began by taking care of one neighbor's child, then another. These families, who were close before the child care arrangement developed, became intimately involved with each other. Even when families did not know each other before, they sometimes build strong relationships with the other child care families as well as the provider's family. It is not uncommon in family child care for families to socialize on weekends or for the provider's children to be cared for by the other parents on weekends.

In some centers, the staff camaraderie extends to parents as well, many of whom have been involved with the center for several years with two or more children. Staff and parents at one center referred to each other as extended family. For families in some centers as well as homes, the network of friends from child care form the core of their social lives.

Two interviewees mentioned that one of the reasons they preferred to work in child care rather than public schools was that they could be involved with the children's parents. "I can't imagine teaching young children and not talking to their parents every day," said one teacher. Seymour Sarason (1982) describes how parents and teachers in public schools tend to be strangers to each other, whose only interactions occur around highly ritualized and superficial occasions unless the child is in trouble and the parent must be called in. While providers tend to be especially involved with parents, staff in these good centers always went beyond the kind of public school exchanges Sarason described.

Some caregivers were highly sympathetic to working parents and the stresses of modern family life, especially on single parents (as seen in the earlier discussion of Service to a Cause). One director said, "I get satisfaction from doing whatever I can to help families function well, even if it's just helping them find good baby-sitters for evenings and weekends." A few interviewees, mostly family child care providers, voiced satisfaction at being seen as experts by parents.

> They all act like they think I'm a doctor. See, I keep the babies usually. And they's mothers, it's the first child, and a lot of them never even been around a baby before. And I practically raise them. I tell them everything. They don't

> know how to do anything when they first start. Most of them don't have a mother real close, or the mother works. So they learn to rely on me. I always been blunt about it. I says "Now do so and so," or "Don't do so and so." If it's for the kid's sake, you know I tell them. If I think something's wrong I tell them. I reckon that's why they ask me, cause I've always just told them what I thought about things if they didn't know. Of course, no kids alive, I don't care if you had 1000, you wouldn't find 2 alike. But after you've been around them for awhile you can pretty well get used to them.

Frustrations with Parents. The following examples could be classified as dissatisfactions, but in fact these frustrations made some of the interviewees feel their work was all the more important and thus satisfying.

Several interviewees in both homes and centers discussed their frustrations with parents. Extremely common was an ambivalence or downright disapproval of parents who used child care in ways that the workers would not have done. Many of the child care workers did not believe in full-day care for infants. Others disapproved of the long hours that children were left in care (perhaps ten hours per day in family child care). Contempt is not too strong a label for what some felt about those parents who will not leave work to come pick up their sick children. Part of these workers' satisfaction is that they are making up for the lack in such parents.

Others observed that some of their parents could not or would not want to stay home with their children. Some seemed to feel this was a loss to the parents, and probably to the child, but since they felt that way, it could not be helped. Rather than blaming the parents, they pitied them. Stacy observed:

> Many parents are working because they don't want to stay home with their children. They love their kids but they tell me they couldn't stay at home with them. I don't think they realize how important children are to the next generation. It depends on how the kids turn out, what's going to happen around here. I think they don't see that one of the most important jobs there is, is raising children.

Eula seemed not to blame or pity. She seemed to feel that she was simply more suited to be with children.

> I don't mind the children. This mother of twins was telling me that they were already getting to her, after just one day. I don't get really tired of them till Thursday afternoon. Some of the mothers tell me by Sunday they're ready to bring them back to me. They get tired of them, but I don't mind them, even if they're all over me. Even in a store, or in church or something, I try to get their attention, get them to respond.
>
> I have one mother who's about to have another baby. We've already talked a little bit, back and forth, about me keeping the two children. She's a teacher's assistant, she doesn't make very much money, she'll be paying me $90 a week. I said "You don't want to do that." She said "I can't stay home with no 2 babies."

Sense of Responsibility — Someone's Got to Take Care of the Children. A few times I heard providers or teachers express the theme: *some*body's got to take care of the children. Tones ranged from exasperated to alarmed, and yet they also seemed to glad to have the opportunity to fill in the void. A teacher in an infant-toddler center in a Boston high-tech manufacturing company complained:

> I look at myself and then I look at the parents in our center. They're out there doing their careers and they expect us to stay back here and raise their children.

> Last month I took care of Gregory for two nights while his mother did an exhibit in Chicago for the company. His father "couldn't manage" to take care of him — and Gregory's such a beautiful child. So he came home with me for a couple nights.
>
> It breaks me up to see the neglected kids, the uncared-for ones. And these are supposedly privileged families!

Natural Mothers

Some interviewees see the mothering role as central to their identities, which makes child care gratifying work for them. They feel that loving and nurturing are what children need most, and they take a deep pleasure in assuring that children are well taken care of in this respect. Some of these women are opposed to shifting the focus of child care to education — they feel that we must keep the emphasis on the *care*. While this approach is more common in family child care, it is found in some center teachers, especially those of younger children.[1]

There are two separate aspects of this theme. The first is especially characteristic of many family child care providers who began doing this work because they wanted to remain with their own children. The other reflects some women's attitude that being with children is their natural state, the way they should spend their time.

Being With One's Own Children. More than half the providers I interviewed had started taking care of other children because they wanted to work and stay home with their own children at the same time. Sharma had searched unsuccessfully for

> somebody special to take care of LeRoy. We had a friend who had been doing day care for years, but she was full. I didn't know what to do, so I took a leave of absence. A neighbor asked me to watch her child. My friend said, "If you're going to do day care, you have to get licensed."
>
> I thought I'd just do it until Lee was in first grade. But I got more and more into day care. . . . It's a good job to be home, to be with your children. You make some money, you help out. If you're a natural mother, you get to do what you like to do.

Center teachers and directors often had flexible jobs that could accommodate the needs of their own children more than most jobs would. Sometimes their children attended the centers, sometimes for reduced fees. When her first child was born, Sonia returned to working in a child care center where she had worked several years earlier.

> I've been here for almost 5 years this time. I came back to the toddler room, then I got pregnant with my second child. I stayed here during my pregnancy for the whole time. I left on maternity leave for 7 weeks to have my second daughter. I came back and she came with me and my other daughter was going here at the time. We get a teacher's discount. So I brought the baby back with me.

Linda, like many directors, had to work some evenings and weekends. As a single parent of school-age children, she appreciated being "able to take them to work with me. The center was a big playhouse for them. The other teachers understood when I needed to take time for my children." Barry liked the idea that his own children could be nearby in the center he directed.

On the other hand, two teachers mentioned that it was hard to work with children all day and then go home to their own children at night. I remember feeling, when teaching preschoolers when my own children were the same age, that I was giving my best to other people's children, then coming home in exhaustion to my own. One provider said that she was able to be patient with the children all day but sometimes she "lost it" with her own children in the evening.

Belonging With Children. Many of these caregiver-teachers feel like they belong with children. Several providers had strong identities of being someone who is at home with children. When asked how they came to be working with children, many began their stories with their own childhoods. Rosie said

> I'd been told all my life that I have a knack with children. I look at kids as people rather than little, cute . . I enjoy them. I was the perpetual babysitter. When I was about twelve, my sister and I had a backyard morning school in the summer. The kids brought 10¢ a day dues. When we were in high school we had a Saturday morning ballet school. My sister was one year younger than me and she was the ballerina. We would have little recitals, and the parents enjoyed them. We were doing things that most high school kids would not think of doing because we were so excited about kids and enjoyed being around them.
>
> Our parents encouraged us to do whatever we wanted to do. Like my father painted the basement pink and put a beret up so we could do the school in a nice way. They both put up with all these kids running around and my mother would help us out when a kid was not doing what they should do. They love babies. My father will grab a baby out of your arms. And babies love him.

Personal Growth

Several interviewees mentioned ways that their work contributed to their own growth. Trudy's sense of personal fulfillment was dramatic:

> I never wish I was doing something else. Even in the morning when I get up, everything is positive that I'm thinking. I didn't find out who I was until after I had this day care.
>
> I didn't like the way I was raised. I struggled with my marriage for years. When I decided this, I knew it was what I wanted. I have discovered myself since I opened up here. I've felt just great.

What Molly, like many others, has learned with young children carries over to other parts of her life:

> Sometimes the thing that excites me most about working with kids is how it helps me with my own growth and development. I've been thinking recently that by learning how to care for children as best I can, I am learning more about how to love. In my family we weren't too sure how we felt about each other. My parents were ambivalent about how they felt about themselves, and each other, and I'm not sure they exactly loved us kids. They never abused us, but they did neglect us. Nobody talked to me about the things that bothered me. So it gives me a lot of pleasure working with a child, to help her identify what is troubling her and figure out what to do about it.
>
> As I get to know the kids through such intimate and important conversations, I find I truly love them and accept them with all their little quirks and foibles. I realized that I was accepting my manfriend in the same open way, which isn't something I've exactly felt before. I think I'm more tolerant for having known all kinds of children. Over the ten years I've been teaching, I've really gotten to know about 150 little people in all their variations. Maybe what I'm saying is I'm more accepting of individual differences. I know I am.

When I was a teacher, I felt that by learning to love or care about not only the easily lovable children, but all the children I taught, I was learning how to love humanity. It makes me more patient with the supermarket clerk to have learned to be patient with Theresa. To have learned to care about George, in spite of the aversion I felt when I first met him, makes me more accepting of a friend's husband.

Annie extended this theme:

> You know, sometimes we are therapists. In fact, I believe that I have been a helpful therapist to many of the children I work with. I think I might really help a couple of troubled children every year, and several more learn things that are real interventions in their personality development. It is so satisfying to see such reactions.
>
> When I think about why day care people are so low status, it's partly the discrepancy between the great importance they give their work, and parents' and society's lack of recognition for their efforts. It is early childhood when a person's sense of self is formed. It is much better to do a good job than to try to repair the damage later. You know M. Scott Peck? He says it's very hard to teach self-esteem, self-respect, and belief-in-self to adults, and I believe it. Frankly, I think the quality of attachment babies have with their caregivers is probably a basic influence on their ability to form relationships later in life. Especially if they are in care a lot. I really worry about the children that bounce from one child care situation to another in their first couple years. Are they going to grow up to be decent spouses and parents and citizens? If only we understood this better, we could probably justify the cost of good day care in saved therapy, remedial education, and prison bills alone. [laughs]

Molly said:

> Working with children has made me a better parent. The reason I believe in parenting education because I know how much I've learned since I started taking courses and teaching. I'm looking forward to being a grandmother so I'll have a chance to be with my grandkids the ways I know how to be with children now.

Clearly, the opportunity for personal growth is one component of the challenge of this work for some caregivers.

Autonomy, Responsibility, Power

Autonomy and Responsibility. A few interviewees mentioned or implied that they liked the autonomy and/or responsibility they have on the job. Those who have worked in other jobs are aware of these factors; many others seem to take it for granted. The theme Helping Children Grow and Learn is made up of satisfactions that are based on autonomy, responsibility, and sense of empowerment.

When people choose to work in child care instead of public schools, autonomy is one of the key reasons. Other studies have identified the importance of autonomy to early childhood workers (Leavitt, 1986; Modigliani et al., 1985; Whitebook, 1981). The research on public school teacher job satisfaction shows that the most extreme dissatisfiers for public school teachers are imposed curricula, and rigid time pressures and routines (Freedman, Jackson, & Boles, 1982; Jackson, 1968; Lortie, 1975; Sweeney, 1981). While imposed and inappropriate curricula are common in poor child care centers, with one exception they did not seem to exist in the usually good centers sampled here. One teacher said she liked it that

> There isn't as much paperwork as in public school, and I get to create, to veer off from what I am doing and pick it up in another way.

Directors usually have a lot of both responsibility and autonomy, within the constraints of their budgets, and sometimes their boards or institutional sponsors. One director mentioned that he liked being able to decide how he'll spend his time, like whether to go to a particular meeting or not. Another said she liked having the leeway to make decisions for herself.

Family child care providers have almost complete autonomy and absolute responsibility. Michele said with pride:

> I'm as much a professional at what I do as the top executive of any corporation. I'm in control of my own choices. I don't feel someone is tugging at me. I have to use time management to get everything done, but I'm in control, choosing how to spend my time.

Only Barry and Annie, in their relative states of burnout, suggested that they had too much responsibility. This is a curvilinear variable — too much or too little is not as satisfying as an intermediate amount. Some of the teachers, like Deb, who were bored with their work because they did not have a chance to grow could be seen as lacking enough responsibility (see Opportunity for Advancement at the end of the next chapter).

Power. Across the United States, workers' desire for power is an important factor in job satisfaction, especially for men (Veroff et al., 1981). Satisfaction from power was expressed directly by only one interviewee, although for her it was strong. When asked what she liked best about her job, Elfreda immediately replied:

> I know how aggravating it is to get to work, and you get there you got a boss or other people in the office and you have to try to satisfy everybody. I've done worked in public enough to know that it's not easy. Here I'm my own boss. [Repeats with emphasis:] *Ah'm ba-oss* [boss], *really* [laughs a smug and perhaps slightly devilish chortle.] If I go out to work, somebody else is going to be boss. I like it, especially with the little kids. I get attached to em. I get em when they're born, *I can raise em like I wo-ant* [want] [laughs].

Elfreda exerted a high degree of control over the children. While I agree with Polakow (1982/1992) that many poor-quality caregivers enjoy bossing kids around, such types did not get recommended for this study except in Elfreda's case. Her enjoyment of being "ba-oss" should have disqualified her from recommendation as a good teacher (the large resource and referral agency that recommended her had never seen her with children). Directors, especially directors of large centers who supervise several staff members, must gain some sense of power. But on the whole, having power over children and a child care program probably does not satisfy the urge for power in most people. Power over something inconsequential is not meaningful power. But since these workers feel that child care is important, perhaps they enjoy feelings of power that I did not pick up.

Child care centers, like families and other institutions, can be democratic, authoritarian, or permissive. The elementary school teacher research suggests that this is an important factor in job satisfaction. Teachers in schools where the atmosphere is formal and the authority is hierarchical and controlling feel significantly more alienated than do those from informal schools where teachers have a voice in decisions (Freedman et al., 1982; Jackson, 1968; Sarason, 1982). Whitebook, Howes, Darrah, & Friedman (1982) found that few child care teachers were included in the major policy decisions of their centers, such as hiring and setting financial priorities. More than half the teachers in that study reported that the people who set policy were often ill-informed and insensitive to the ramifications of their decisions. Jorde-Bloom (1986b) had found that effective centers are characterized by equity. Pay, work schedules, and promotions are awarded fairly, there is respect and tolerances for individual differences in ideas, culture, and lifestyle; diversity is valued; and employees' time is valued — paperwork and meetings are purposeful.

These factors simply were not problems for most of the teachers I interviewed. I believe the rest of teachers in these interviews worked for relatively equitable centers where they could plan their own curricula and generally had a voice in the decisions that they wanted to influence. There is a tendency for good teachers to be sought by or seek out — and perpetuate — good centers.

There is also an element of power in the satisfactions teachers and providers take in setting up an environment and initiating experiences, and then watching the children respond. Molly spoke of how they had "created our own little microcosm" in the center she started.

Autonomy and influence over decisions seems to have been important to many of the interviewees even though they never named these aspects of their work. They seem to take them for granted — another silent theme of the interviews. When caregivers talk about their rewarding work, or its challenge, or the pleasure they feel watching children learn from the environment they set up, their own decision-making power and problem-solving opportunities are necessary, but taken for granted, conditions.

Bill Ayers (1989) identified a teacher who felt empowered by helping young children feel a sense of their own power that she had been denied as a child. Several of the people I talked to conveyed a sense of rectifying childhood difficulties through helping children have more positive experiences.

The Lack of Differences in Satisfaction by Gender and Race

There are remarkably few gender differences in satisfaction between the 4 men and 24 women in this study who work in child care. Similarly, the themes running through the 6 African-American's stories and the 1 Asian-American's compared to the Caucasians were indistinguishable by race. Perhaps a larger sample would find subtle gender or racial differences in satisfaction, but they would be unlikely to be as strong as the differences that emerged from this study.

Satisfaction With Income

One final point about the satisfactions of early care and education professionals. While most are not satisfied with their incomes and many are highly dissatisfied, as we will see in the next chapter, there are a few who are truly satisfied with the amount of money they are paid for this work. These few teachers and providers had one thing in common. They were of low socio-economic status, and they saw child care as a positive alternative compared to other minimum wage jobs. Child care offered them a chance to do meaningful, gratifying work and get paid as much as they would in other jobs. They were satisfied with their pay, but they weren't excited about it enough to mention it directly. It is only in contrast to the more common attitude of dissatisfaction with income that their feelings become noteworthy. For this reason I have included their stories in the next chapter as a variation of the more common theme of dissatisfaction with income.

In conclusion, it appears that good child care workers are highly satisfied by one or many aspects of the intrinsic rewards of their work. This explains why anybody would do this work, and calls into question the assumption of mainstream economists that people work for money and little else. This study shows that job satisfaction functions as alternative compensation. Chapter 5 takes a closer look at the way "non-pecuniary rewards" influence the labor market.

Next, we turn to the dissatisfaction themes and the explanations for the shortage of caregivers despite the satisfactions of early care and education as work.

Notes to Chapter 3

[1] We see that some child care workers most value nurturing and loving while others value teaching more. Child care professionals argue that the distinction between *child care* and *early education* is neither useful nor accurate. Good programs for children are both, although they can lean in one direction or the other. Historically, day nurseries offered custodial care for poor children and nursery schools offered education and enrichment for middle class children. This artificial distinction is fading, now that middle-class families are using predominantly full-day care, and the government supports some high-quality programs for low-income children.

But both are valid. Some parents value one more than the other and some children need one more than the other. On the following continuum, only the extremes are not recommended:

all nurturing no teaching	more nurturing than teaching	equal nurturing and teaching	more teaching than nurturing	all teaching no nurturing

(not quality) | << the diversity of quality >> | (not quality)

Ideally, child care consumers would make an informed choice from diverse programs are both loving and educational.

CHAPTER 4

THE DISSATISFACTIONS OF CHILD CARE AS WORK

IT'S NOT A "REAL JOB"

When Shannon said that child care was "not a credible job," I asked her what she meant. She answered:

> Credible. Like a real job. Better working conditions, breaks, health insurance. Legitimizing the profession by giving to it what other professions have. A cashier is not a professional. Day care teachers are, shaping the potential of a child. Preschool is considered playing, a non-professional thing: "Why would a college educated person want to do that?" There aren't a lot of television shows starring child care. Auto mechanics make two or three times as much as [a teacher in] our field with a college degree.
>
> My father wants to know why I got all this education to do baby-sitting.

Keisha, another center teacher said:

> I think we put up with a lot because we do like our work. I'll put up with it for now. A lot of teachers here have husbands that support them. They make $4 an hour, and that's the spending money. But if you're single like me it's a problem.
>
> People just think you're a baby-sitter. All the staff here — they're just doing this for now. *It's not a real career.* In a career, you get full benefits, like a corporate job. . . .
>
> My dad *hates* that I work here. He worked and went to school, and has a job that's important. He grew up poor, and so he doesn't want me to live like him.

Though of different social class, education level, race, geographical region, and child care program type, the experience of these two teachers is very similar.

At least four of the interviewees used the same striking phrase — "not a real career" or "not a real job." These people work hard and often long hours. What does it mean — not a real job?

In the last chapter we saw that many child care workers feel strongly positive about some aspects of their jobs while at the same time they feel strongly negative about others. They tend to agree on which aspects are satisfying and which are not: the rewards come from the work itself — as Keisha said, they like their work. What they do not like usually comes from factors outside or extrinsic to the work itself.

Dissatisfaction with income was clearly the most readily mentioned frustration of these interviewees as well as caregivers in other studies. Many were unhappy about their lack of fringe benefits as well. Lack of recognition and respect for early care and education as work is also a great frustration for many of these workers. They smart from the injustice of it all, given how very important they believe their work to be.

Low compensation and lack of recognition are the one and the two of the one-two punch that forces many good child care workers from jobs that they otherwise like very much. This double jeopardy of child care as work turns away many potential teacher-caregivers and causes college students who love children and teaching to avoid child care as a field of work.

In a previous publications, I have reviewed the very large number of factors that converge to cause child care to be so under-paid (1986, 1988, 1992b). In this chapter we will explore the two major dissatisfactions mentioned by most interviewees — income and benefits, and social status and respect. Then we will consider briefly a variety of dissatisfactions reported by a few interviewees.

Income

Most interviewees were articulate about how they feel about their incomes. Following are seven basic themes they addressed:

- Financial Hardship
- Poverty
- Directors — Between a Rock and a Hard Place
- Lack of Unions
- Comparisons to Other Jobs — McDonald's Pays More
- It's not Just the Pay — Its and Low Pay *and* . . .
- Dependence on Spouse's Income

Financial Hardship

A family child care provider from a fairly low-income neighborhood described her financial struggle:

> I'm a real hard worker, I'll work day and night if necessary. When I first started watching children, I worked at the IRS from 6:30 in the evening till 3 in the morning. Go to bed by 4, get up at 6:30 and take care of kids all day. Then one of my daughters came home and took care of the kids during the middle of the day so I could go back to sleep. After a few months I had gotten enough children so I could quit the IRS job.
>
> My big problem now is that, money-wise, it's not enough for me financially. Most of the ladies who are doing this have men. At the network meetings they are married, and this is the second job in the family.
>
> Six children at $50[1] a week, before expenses. For this area, if I charge more, they'd go someplace else. If I lose one child, I don't have enough to pay my bills. I kind of take turns, juggle my bills back and forth.

During the course of her interview, she also mentioned that she is currently looking for work to do at night after the children leave. She's already working 11 1/2 hours a day with no break.

The next quotation gives a fuller context to Jane's earlier-quoted frustration over the pay she gets for the toughest job she'll ever love (the earlier quote is embedded in the following, more complete version). As she expresses the frustration she feels about her income, she echoes the themes of many of the child care workers I interviewed:

> It shouldn't be this way, but I feel day care teachers don't get the respect they deserve. One of the main factors is our income. It's not a living wage. That shouldn't be, because we work really hard and we're doing important work. It's important because these are people in very formative years. They're learning a lot of important stuff. Positive self-esteem. The work we do deserves a higher wage, more benefits. . . .

> I'm not satisfied with my salary. That's what is going to drive me out. Nobody can last on this, unless I was married to a lawyer. I give up a lot of things to work here. I do it willingly, but the longer I do it the less happy I am about it.
>
> I was driving around with my sister, and I said "I'm tired of not having a car." She said, "It's a real pity. If you made a dollar more an hour, you could afford a car." She's right. A lousy dollar an hour. To get a car now I would have to get a roommate. Last year I made under $10,000 working full time. In the public school you can make double that your first year out. I'm not a money grubber. Never have been. What I go for is work that matters to me.
>
> My peers, my college friends are making good money. They're buying houses and cars. I'm on my way to 40, renting an apartment and I don't have a car. My friends think I'm crazy. But when I think about getting out, I think "What other work am I going to get into that is as satisfying as this?" I don't have an answer. . . . If I were getting a decent salary and more respect, I'd stay. I'd be crazy to leave. But I must admit I don't like to take the bus everywhere. I can't take a weekend camping trip without a car. I had a car when I was in the Peace Corps.
>
> Compared to a person with a 4-year degree, a lot of people in day care are lucky if they have an A.A. [2-year college degree]. Their expectations aren't so high. Any field that pays so low just doesn't inspire one to go into it. I don't ever remember in high school hearing anyone say, "I'm inspired to work in day care." People plan to become attorneys, doctors, nurses, even executive secretaries, business managers. You put in and you get something back. In day care, more and more, they ask for a lot of qualifications. But those people aren't out there. Not only the expenditure of college, but the work — they don't want to do it.

The everyday hassles that come from not having enough money make the lives of many child care workers stressful. Here are some other examples from four interviews:

- Transportation is a big problem in day care. Either my staff don't have cars, or their cars are old clunkers that are always breaking down.
- I feel like a sucker driving down the street in my rusty car. And I wish we could afford to take a real vacation. We always have to go camping.
- I listen to the kids in my center talking about what they did over the weekend. I think, "I wish I could afford to do that with *my* kids." I see the kids' designer clothes, and I wish I could afford to dress my kids like that — no, actually I don't. I just wish I could buy them some new shoes this month.
- I have a roommate and we live in a family house so my rent's not like an apartment. If I lived in an apartment I would never make it. I definitely would not be in this field.

There is a surprising degree of marginality to the incomes of some child care workers. For example, family child care providers who serve very low-income parents never seem to collect a portion of their fees. One for-profit center, that paid only a bit above minimum wage, sent teachers home unpaid on days when they weren't needed because enrollment was low, for instance when the annual chicken pox epidemic hit the center.

Poverty

Several teachers and providers alluded to their poverty status and eligibility for welfare benefits. Two providers received Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC). I do not know whether they were declaring their child care incomes, but both were obviously making very little money. Both were single parents — one had two preschool-age children, the other had one.

One teacher, to dramatize how low her wages were, said, "If I had a child, I would qualify for a tuition voucher at our center [Title XX Block Grant reimbursement for low-income parents]. Another, to illustrate the increases in salary his union had won, said

> My wife and I have been child care teachers for eight years. Three years ago, with our first union contract, we went off food stamps. With our second contract we no longer qualified for day care assistance for our daughter. In our next contract we hope to get raises so that we will no longer quality for federal housing assistance. The raises resulting from the union are taking us out of the welfare system.

Directors — Between a Rock and a Hard Place[2]

The problems that plague this occupation effect directors as well as teachers and providers. The shortage of sufficient financing for child care impacts directors who have to continue to make their centers work in spite of the hiring crisis. One director gave his quite desperate version of this theme, which was expressed by all but one of the directors:

> Despite all the interviewing and hiring we've been doing over the last 2 weeks, out of 17 teachers we have 2 spots that are empty starting next Monday. I don't know what we're going to do. What do you do? All the substitutes have gone back to college this fall. I used to run the ad every Sunday, but now we're running it in the daily paper. That's not too significant, but I feel like its a sign of our desperation — we can't wait until next Sunday. And seeing more and more child care ads in the paper.
>
> One teacher we offered it to, and she said she had a better offer. Part of me said "Mazel Tov." I'm glad. The more people are competing over teachers, that's great. What's going to have to happen, to raise wages, is to feel the shortage.
>
> But in the short run, here we are holding the bag. I mean, Monday morning there has to be somebody there [a teacher in the classroom], or else I'm going to be there. So then I'm not going to be in the office trying to hire people. Or else I'm going to have to hire somebody who I have a lot of reservations about, and I haven't had to do that yet. I've talked to other directors in the city who have worse than my situation. That makes me think I don't want to be doing this any more.

Following are the observations of two directors who have been hiring teachers for many years. One almost echoed the words of the last director:

> This is a bad situation. Two of our teachers gave notice last month. We're already upset about the quality of people we're interviewing for those positions. Then last week Sharon quit, and now Maryann might be moving. I give up. I can't do it. I'm scared about the burden that is falling on the rest of the teachers, and going to fall on them. Let alone the children.
>
> Now our board's gotten into the picture, looking for more applicants. I called the universities and they didn't even have any names for me — I used to get my best teachers from Dr. Petroski. A total of 8 people answered our newspaper ad; we used to get 80. I don't know where to turn from here.

The next teacher gave an economic and social analysis of the situation:

> There's not a lot of people applying for jobs now. There were times when I would put an ad in the paper and the phone would ring 100 times during the day. It depends on the economy. There were not a lot of job choices then. Now people can work at McDonald's and get benefits and get a free hamburger, and get the same wage as in child care. Now program directors put ads in the papers and nobody calls.

Lack of Unions

As seen in the introduction, few child care workers are unionized. Only three of the center workers interviewed belong to unions. The first, quoted above, was highly satisfied with his union, and felt it was responsible for winning major pay raises. The second never mentioned the union in her interview. The third, Deb, was ambivalent about her union. She appreciated that it was responsible for her being compensated for several years of seniority, unlike other centers that she otherwise would have preferred, where new teachers are paid the same as experienced ones. Thus the higher wage was keeping her in her job, "retaining" her. But the union contract defined jobs rigidly, preventing them from being individualized to match the needs and abilities of each staff member, and limiting career development.

> With the union pay scale, I'll be making $10.50 per hour by December. I can't afford to leave, though I'm not growing in this job and I don't expect another job to come open.
>
> But there are some downfalls with the union. Our union has no extra pay for education. Everybody starts at the same rate, and everybody moves up the same. Whether you didn't graduate high school or you have an M.A. in Early Childhood, it's all the same pay. Now they've said we can't hire any more master's degrees, whether they want the job or not, because they say they'll quit soon.
>
> Another thing — all the teacher jobs are the same. You can't have one who spends a couple hours doing administration. I'd like to do some of my director's job, so she could teach a couple courses like she wants to, but the union won't allow it. There's no place for me to grow in this job.

Further, the child care workers in Deb's hospital-based center were part of the secretarial union. The leadership of the union were clerical staff who did not understand or care about child care and were threatened by the teachers' higher education levels. Deb continued,

> Everything that happens in the union, we're the low man. We're the baby-sitters [said with great disdain]. We don't get quality support from the union. We wanted to change our name from "child care workers" to "child care teachers," but they said we couldn't because we're not in a teachers' union. We feel that "child care workers" is very demeaning. In the eyes of the rest of the college, we're baby-sitters.
>
> Also, if you want to go for a merit raise, you can only use four of your ten sick days. Merit depends only on whether you show up at in-service and don't use your sick days, not whether you're a good teacher.

Other concerns about union contracts included that unions make it difficult to fire an inadequate staff member, and that fellow union members perceived the early childhood staff as "just baby-sitters" — a theme to which we shall return. One public school administrator observed that the early childhood teachers in his program were "not aggressive individuals," and did not get much support from their union, which was focused on teachers from kindergarten and above.

But overall, unions usually bring higher wages and better benefits, as they have to public schools and nursing (see Appendix A). They also appear to safeguard other working conditions, such as 40-hour work weeks. It appears that collective bargaining may be one of the most effective ways to increase child care salaries and benefits in settings where there is "someone to strike against." But due to the informal, decentralized nature of most child care settings, that someone does often not exist. In family child care, only when providers are paid through a system or network is there a possible structure for unionization. We shall return to the subject of unions in the next chapter.

Comparisons to Other Jobs — McDonald's Pays More

One's sense of wage justice does not exist in a vacuum. Child care workers look around and see other occupations paying more for work that they believe to be less important, less skilled, and less strenuous. Like most people, according to Warr and Wall (1975), they decide whether a wage is fair or not by considering some combination of the required skills, knowledge, responsibility, physical effort, and length of learning period compared to those in other jobs. One teacher said with a bitter irony, "I could make more scoopin' ice cream at Baskin Robbins." Another said "McDonald's pays more than we pay assistant teachers or subs. Forget about finding subs."

Annie has a master's degree and many years of teaching experience. She is a single parent living in a large metropolitan area where the cost of living is high. As we saw in Chapter 2, comparing her income to her friends' was distressing.

> I'm 42 years old and I'm making $7.50 an hour and I have two kids in college. I look around at my friends with master's degrees, who are making $30,000 a year, and I think "What *is* this?" Even the day care parents who are on scholarships and have state subsidies — the majority of them are making more money than I am. And I'm making more money than most people working in day care in this city. Most day care teachers in this city make about $5.50, tops. It doesn't much matter if you have a master's degree or B.A., or if you dropped out of high school.

Not only was her salary unsatisfactory, but in *contrast* to other jobs requiring master's degrees it was *especially* unsatisfactory. And it particularly irritated her that parents in welfare programs made more money than she did.

A director of a hospital-based program said "I'm making less money than our bookkeeper. I'm managing a program of 50 families and a staff of 15, and I'm getting less than bookkeepers do in this hospital."

It's Not Just the Pay, It's the Low Pay *and* . . .

Often when people talk about the low pay, they name another factor which, when coupled with the low pay, makes it especially frustrating. Remember Annie's lament: "and beside the money, it's getting so little money and getting absolutely no respect." Others mention the low income in the face of how important it is to raise the future generation, or . . . the high level of training and responsibility required, or . . . how demanding the work is. All these secondary factors fuel their sense of injustice about the low incomes.

Dependence on Spouse's Income

Several people mentioned that they had to be married to survive in their jobs. This was true for two of the three men interviewed. In telling his career story, Barry said at one point:

> During this time I got married to a nurse, which made the financial picture much better. Soon after that I went back to a center director job. A lot of the day care

> people I know who are my age are married to somebody who has a real income. I don't know too many two-day-care or one-day-care [single parent] families.

A married teacher said:

> It's not the money for me. I am a Born-Again Christian and I know that money is not going to solve my problems. I've found through every day experience and I know who my source is, that even if I could not work, my source would be Jesus anyway. Making $20,000 would make me have a larger income, but it would not change me. Also I have my husband (laughs). I pay some bills but it's not like I have to rely on my salary for our two children.

An unusually large percentage of child care workers and an ever-greater percentage of family child care providers are married. The first explanation for this is probably that a single child care income is not enough to support most single people, let alone families.

Variations on the Theme — Satisfaction With Income

In contrast to the rest, a few interviewees did not seem to be dissatisfied with their pay. They are included here because their lack of dissatisfaction did not constitute a positive satisfaction and their stories are most interesting when compared to those of income-dissatisfied workers. The three variations on the main theme include workers who are content to be dependent upon their spouse's income, those who have low expectations for income level, and those who are making relatively high incomes.

Variation 1: We Don't Need My Income. The first variation were women married to men with good incomes. Women who formed their basic career attitudes before the women's movement of the 1970's are likely to be content with low incomes if their husband's incomes are satisfactory. Younger women appear less willing to be dependent on their husbands in this way — these same young women are more concerned by the low status of the work as well, as discussed in the next section. Some middle-aged and older women accepted their financial dependence on their husbands as natural and not offensive. Others may have been content earlier in their lives, but have changed their values as Molly did during the 1980s:

> Money isn't everything, but . . . I used to want a job where I could make a difference, do something where I felt I was making good use of my abilities — that was all. None of our friends had any money either, so it didn't matter. We prided ourselves on doing meaningful work and living simply. Like our old rusty VW squareback was cool.
>
> But the glamor has faded, and now I would like to make a more decent living. I feel like a sucker driving down the street in my current rusty car. I wish I could afford to take a real vacation.

This suggests that unless income goes up, the shortage of early care and education workers is likely to increase as older women with more traditional attitudes retire.

Variation 2: It's Enough to Get By On. In the second income-satisfied group are women with few other (perceived) job options and no college education. They confirm that income expectations vary with education and social class, and that satisfaction with pay is based on income expectations. Denise, for example, dropped out of high school when she became pregnant. After her third child was born, she got her first job. Even its less-than-minimum wage pay satisfied her for a while:

> I never worked at all until my two older ones were in school. Then I got a job making sandwiches for vending machines, where they paid less than minimum. It was *money*, because I'd never made any of my own. When you go from not

> working at all, you feel, oh my gosh, that's a lot of money. At first my husband was taking care of all of us, but then I started making money, and the things he once did, he depleted. There were things that I saw that I wanted, because I was working. So it got to the place that I wanted more, and thought I deserved more.
>
> All my life I had been with children, baby-sitting, working in church programs and vacation Bible school. I decided I needed to get into working with children. So that's another reason why I came with Mrs. Carlisle [center's director], because I knew she was offering more. Here now, I appreciate what I'm making, though sometimes I want more.

Denise also felt like she was "somebody" because she had a job, especially a job as a *teacher*. Center teachers are perceived as teachers, with all due respect, by some parents. Her family greatly respected her work. The current study is too limited to explain this finding, but in a subsequent study focusing on low-income family child care providers, I have clearly confirmed this finding. In fact, the providers I have interviewed in this current study feel that they have a very good job: they make as much money as they would expect to in any other job, plus they have the daily rewards of being with children and being their own boss. These findings raise new hypotheses which will be addressed in our forthcoming *The Economics of Family Child Care* (Modigliani, in press).

Carol's salary was high enough to get by on, so long as she was satisfied living with her grandparents, because it let her do "the Lord's work" — for her this was supplemental compensation.

Here again we glimpse the rewards of early childhood work which may be used to support and retain child care workers.

Variation 2: I'm Making Good Money. The third category of workers who are satisfied with their incomes are large-group family child care providers (typically caring for 12 children with one assistant) who are in fact making solid middle-class incomes — often considerably more than center staff, even directors. Two providers in my sample showed this pattern. One group family provider said "I'll tell you this — I'm making more than I did when I taught in the public schools." In her state, that was a fairly high income. She cleared almost $40,000 (in 1987). Most of the parents in her program were health care professionals who could afford her top-of-the-county rates ($125/month in 1987); most of the remainder were school teachers who realized that it is was worth paying more than market rates to get quality care for their infants and toddlers. Another example in this category is a rural, working-class provider who was very proud of her business, and pleased with all aspects of her work (the one who said "I have discovered myself since I opened up here"). She had recently expanded to a group home with 18 children and 2 assistants, and was probably making about $15,000-20,000 per year (in 1988), in a community where the cost of living is quite low. She was clearly surprised and delighted that she was so financially successful. She too is a striking example of a person for whom child care proved to be an excellent occupation.

Family child care providers often have no idea how much money they make because they have not totalled their expenses. Only the two out of the 11 in this study reported their incomes to the Internal Revenue Service and therefore had calculated their last year's gross income — parents' fees and reimbursements for low-income families or the Child and Adult Care Food Program reimbursements. One of them had also kept track of her expenses. These were the most middle-class and business-like providers and they charged the highest fees. At the other extreme, two providers (that I know of) were also supported by AFDC, perhaps legally, and others appeared to make very low incomes and received no government support.

In sum, the providers earn less than center staff, and they clearly tended to be of lower socio-economic status, judging by appearances. But the socio-economic range in family child care is also greater, and a few providers are making higher incomes than center teachers or directors.

Fringe Benefits

This study sheds little light on the area of fringe benefits. Most of the people interviewed received few employment benefits, although the topic of benefits was seldom introduced by the interviewees. Are such benefits not important to these child care workers? Or is it taken for granted that benefits do not come with child care jobs? Following is the little information about benefits gleaned from the interviews. These remarks, mentioned in passing, did not carry the passion that often accompanied complaints about income.

The centers that offered good benefit packages were affiliated with larger institutions; one teacher mentioned that, while she has lots of gripes about the corporation that sponsors her center, their benefit package is exceptional. The only center that was part of a for-profit chain had fairly good benefits in spite of their very low salaries.

Paid Vacations? Concerning vacations, several family child care providers worked 52-week years, confirming the findings in Appendix A. One closed for one week every August; one group home provider hired herself a sub for one week every winter and one week every summer. She explained, "I'd go crazy if I didn't take a week off every six months." One center closes for two weeks every July. The staff, who have paid vacations, were highly pleased with this arrangement. The director claimed that it worked well for their (predominantly low-income) families, who are informed of the policy when they enroll.

Two interviewees mentioned the attractiveness of summers off as they discussed the possibility of getting public-school jobs.

Retirement? One teacher remained in her job, even though it wasn't her first-choice center, partially because her retirement would be vested after she had worked in her center for 10 years (she had 3 more to go). Two of the interviewees, both over age 40, mentioned that they were worried about not having any pension or retirement savings.

Health Insurance? No one mentioned health insurance. Almost two-thirds of the interviewees were married, and I would guess that many of them were covered by their spouses' health insurance. They did seem to take this for granted. Even women who do not like to be dependent on their husbands' incomes probably do not mind being covered by their insurance.

(Interestingly, I did hear this concern in a subsequent study of low-income providers from Providence, Rhode Island. Lack of health insurance was their greatest problem — more discouraging than their annual incomes of $5,000-10,000. Many of these women were not married, others had husbands who were unemployed.)

Tuition Support. Two teachers and one director mentioned getting college tuition reimbursements. For one of the teachers this was a strong retention incentive. All three were taking child-related courses which probably improved the quality of their work as well as their job satisfaction.

In spite of the low incomes and lack of benefits, some caregivers are much more concerned by the lack of respect.

Lack of Respect and Status

Interviewees share a consensus, virtual unanimity, in their sense of indignity at the way other people view child care as work. While dissatisfaction with their incomes may be more evident and perhaps easier to complain about, most of these people were deeply troubled by the lack of respect paid their work. A sizable majority of those interviewed felt varying degrees of frustration and sometimes anger about the low status of child care as work. They call it by different names — respect, status, prestige, legitimacy, credibility — but they are talking about the same thing. As seen in the Introduction, the Michigan survey also identified lack of respect to be a major reason teachers and directors were considering leaving child care.

DON'T Call Us Baby-Sitters

The basic code word for non-educational/non-developmental caregiving is "baby-sitting."[3] Susan, director of a community college child care center, said:

> One of my frustrations is parents who call up and say, "I want to know about your baby-sitting service." We're so much more than a preschool, let alone a baby-sitting service. I'm trying to get the college to make us an Instructional Program.

Barb, a large-home provider, told this story of a discouraging moment:

> I've worked with this wonderful family for years. All three of their children have been with me. Our families are friends. One day the grandmother came to pick up the children, and she called her daughter at work. I heard her say on the phone, "I'm at the sitter's." It broke my heart.

Whenever child care workers pronounce the word "baby-sitter" they usually spit it. The popular new tee shirts of New York's Citywide Family Day Care Association read "Don't call me a baby-sitter — I haven't sat on a baby yet."

The intensity of their feelings is explained by findings of the Riley and Rodgers study of licensed Wisconsin center- and home-based child care professionals:

> Virtually every child care teacher (in both centers and homes) disagreed with the statement "Providers are basically just baby-sitters," and 96% stated they believe that "Day care providers strongly influence child development." . . . In stark contrast, 93% of child care teachers believe that the public views their work as baby-sitting, and only one in five (21%) believes that the public perceives child care is influential on a child's development. . . .
>
> One hundred percent of family day care providers and 96% of child care teachers believe that "child care is a profession just like social work and education are professions." In comparison, only 6% perceive the public having the same view. (1989, p. 42)

It would be useful to replicate this series of questions with parents and the general public.

There's No Respect for Child Care Workers

Annie (the teacher who earned $7.50 an hour despite her master's degree and years of teaching experience) lived in an expensive city as a single parent. In the following excerpts from her interview, she reveals that she is most bitter about the lack of recognition she feels from her friends, from the parents at her center, and from society as a whole. She articulates her feelings as she explains why she will leave her job:

> . . . It's getting so little money and getting absolutely no respect. I belong to this group of teachers who are teachers from preschool through college, and people think what I do is a joke. There's such a little respect. They don't understand why I'm doing what I'm doing and wonder when I am going to stop. I think they liken what I'm doing to baby-sitting. . . .
>
> When I tell my friends I left my school job [working with troubled adolescents, where a violent incident caused her to quit], I've gone back to day care, the

> response is "Don't you feel that's a step backward?" There's *no respect*. Then in turn, I don't respect myself.
>
> If there was a big respect for early childhood people, there also would be a much greater salary for those people. You learn in college about how the early years are the prime time for development, and how crucial those years are, and yet the professor who's telling you that is earning five times more that the person who will be molding that development.
>
> I think, coming from a working class background, I used to be proud to say I was a day care worker. . . . Politically it felt like a good thing to be. Now I feel too old for that. And I want to feel respected, and I don't. I don't feel respected by the parents. I mean, they like me. And I'm indispensable because I make their life work. And that's all, that's the reason. I'm not looked at with the same kind of (pause), "respect"'s not the right word, (pause), I don't know what it is. It's sort of a cross between respect, and — I don't see parents, for instance, saying "Gee, I'd like to have her skills, I'd like to be as good as she is as calming down that scene." I could see them looking at other parents who have jobs they think they might like to do. I don't feel that coming towards me. . . .
>
> I think there's something about day care workers, which (pause). . . Maybe it has to do with lack of self worth. Maybe all the [lack of] money and the respect feed into something that says, "You're not really worth that much." So if you're not really worth that much, you can put up with a lot. . . . There's something about this: because the world devalues day care workers, then day care workers devalue day care workers.

Many other interviewees shared these sentiments, though perhaps with less self-awareness or intensity.

Barry and Shannon were two other interviewees who were planning to leave their jobs. They too were bothered by the low status at least as much as their salaries. Barry (the director who was about to leave his job and its overwhelming problems) reminisced how he felt when he had been a teacher:

> There was no status. No security to it. The wage was low enough that you couldn't possibly have a family on it. Also I felt that somehow being a man that even more so people didn't take it seriously as what you wanted to do. But nobody really did it for a real job.
>
> My first head teacher left to go to law school. I thought about that recently. I don't hear about too many teachers any more who leave and go to law school, or get elite-type degrees, as there were in the 60s and 70s. The people I see now are more likely to have an A.A. degree.
>
> I don't think I'm seeking prestige [by looking for a better job]. No matter how high you get in child care, it's still not prestigious.

This Isn't a "Real Job". Annie said her teachers' group thought her child care job was "a joke." Barry said that the teachers he used to work with did not think they had "real jobs," that people did not take seriously that this was the career he had chosen. Keisha's quote at the beginning of this chapter notes that society as well as her family does not consider child care a career. Three of these workers had left their jobs within three months of our interviews. Two left the field of child care, Barry moved into a state-level advocacy job. These three people also have in common their 4-year college degrees. Looking through the interviews, the more educated workers were the most distressed by the low respect.

Because this difference was pronounced, it is interesting to consider the two variations of this theme before exploring it further. A few interviewees seemed to be satisfied with their respect and recognition.

Variation 1: I'm Proud to be in Child Care. This sentiment was voiced by Denise (who used to make sandwiches for vending machines). She was the only interviewee who clearly felt proud to tell her friends that she is a child care teacher. She also felt her wages were enough to get by on. Child care was a true step up for her. She felt like "somebody" in just having a job, and particularly a teacher's job. Her family respected her work. Similarly, the low-income providers in my subsequent Providence study agreed with Denise. Their work was higher status in their minds than their friends' work in usually menial, minimum-wage jobs or welfare support. The relativity of expectations in determining satisfaction applies here as well as to satisfaction with income. In other words, these women from poor families and with little education see child care as a good job. It is meaningful and dignified and it pays as well as the other jobs they could get.

Three of the interviewees mentioned that others looked down on their work, but they didn't seem bothered by what the others thought.

Variation 2: I Don't Care What Others Think. The three interviewees who proclaimed or demonstrated that they ignored what others think are all family child care providers: June, Tom, and Rosie. All three are people who don't seem to care what people think about other areas of their lives as well. All were challenged by their work. I believe all three would readily admit to marching to a different drummer and being proud of it. Does family child care attract people who are independent thinkers?

But even these three people felt ambivalent sometimes. Rosie explained:

> I think my mother's finally realized that I'm not going to direct a day care center when I grow up. That's what she thinks would be the prestigious thing to do. "Why would you want to stay at home, with the rest of the world tromping along?" I like to be a little different from other people and family day care is a good way, and to help people raise their consciousness that staying at home with children is a valuable occupation. . . .
>
> When people used to ask me what I did, and I'd say I stay home with kids, they'd walk away from me. But if I say I do workshops and I write, and I'm a family day care provider, they say "Oh, tell me more." That gives you prestige.

Interestingly, all three are also married to people who have good incomes. Does this insulate them from feelings of low-status from their work?

The more highly educated interviewees seemed to suffer most from the low status of child care as work, but those with less education also chafed under the lack of respect. Trudy (the provider who dropped out of high school when she became pregnant and had never worked for pay until she began her obviously thriving family child care mini-center, where she "discovered herself") suffers from her friends' low opinion of her work:

> At first when I told my friends what I was doing, they said, "You're *what?*" But then I go to the day care homes workshops and they make me feel just wonderful. There's 20 members of our group. I didn't want to be just a baby-sitter. I felt to survive I wanted more. I want to get a certificate up there [pointing to the wall near the front door]. I'm going to our community college to get my 44-hour certificate. We're really a day care now but we have preschool activities. I'll start calling it a preschool when I get my certificate.

> We have to teach the public that were not just baby-sitters. I'm still feeling insecure about that. When parents move their kids to a preschool, I feel crushed.

The various professional associations allow providers, teachers, and directors to reaffirm the value of their work to each other. Individuals repeat these affirmations to themselves as well: "I know I'm not a baby-sitter. This is one of the most important jobs in the world." Unfortunately, caregivers do not seem to value the deep respect the good ones receive from children who come to know them. They value the children's love, but noone mentioned respect.

Friends, Family, People We Meet. Annie and Trudy were bothered by their friends' disrespect. Shannon and Rosie's fathers thought they weren't doing what they could and should be with their educations. Carol told of a dilemma she'd felt when first choosing this field:

> One summer my grandmother was working for a day care. She asked me if I wanted to come there too. I knew I would love it, but I didn't want to make the commitment. I was scared I was going to disappoint people. My [other] grandparents wanted me to get a job that was paying something and you could climb the ladder of success, don't get yourself in a rut. Day care workers didn't have a very good reputation. I never heard people say very much about day care workers.

Many others worried about how to present their work to people they met. In a previous article I described my own feelings as a teacher-director:

> My prototypic example of the status problem was the dread I felt at being in a social gathering and being asked what I "did." Even though I spent more than half my time as the head teacher of a group of young children, I learned to say that I was the director of the center — it had a little more status than admitting that I worked directly with children as well. But inevitably the stranger would change the subject anyway, or move on to talk to someone else.
>
> Then one year I took a leave of absence from my job, to assume a similar set of responsibilities directing another social service agency. My answer to the dreaded question changed slightly. Before it was "I'm the Director of Pound House Children's Center"; then it became "I'm the Director of the Domestic Violence Project." Sounded similar to me, but the difference in people's reactions was astounding. They kept talking to me. They asked other questions about my work! They remembered me the next time we met.
>
> (Modigliani, 1986, p.53)

Several other interviewees made the same point.

Another teacher describing the dread of party conversations said "Your peers know you're paid peanuts." Like Rosie who has learned to say that she is a writer before admitting she is also a provider, a non-profit director said "I'm learning how to talk to people who aren't in the field, to use the prestigious catch words, "I'm running a business." There is a quality of humiliation and self-degradation to these stories.

Even the Parents in My Program Don't Respect Me. This theme too struck intense feelings in caregivers. It seems particularly hurtful that parents who have opportunities to *see* caregivers' skills and dedication, and who benefit from well-cared-for children, still take the caregivers for granted. This confirms Bollin's finding that parents' respect is a critical component of providers' job satisfaction (1989).

On the other hand, several people mentioned that some individual parents were highly appreciative. Some parents made a special point to thank them for what they did, gave gifts or sent cards. Such recognition was usually very meaningful to the recipients.

Jane (the Peace Corps veteran), after saying that if she were getting a decent salary and more respect, she would stay in her job, added:

> People plan to become attorneys, nurses, even executive secretaries, and business managers. You put in and you get something back. In day care you don't build anything.
>
> Many parents [at this center] are working on their Master's. I consider them my peers. They don't realize I have a Master's. They might think I have a couple years of community college. I feel somewhat like an underclass citizen. It's frustrating.

Education Raises Status. In this society, salary is the major determinant of the social status of an occupation and perhaps even the status of a person, but the level of education required by a job also determines its status. When the group that conducted the Michigan survey asked people outside the field to guess the average educational level of county child care teachers, most people guessed they had graduated from high school. In fact, the majority in this education-focused community had graduated from four-year colleges. There is a circularity here. Child care is of such low status that people assume its teachers must not be college-educated. Paula Jorde-Bloom (1988) identified the catch 22: society views the work as unskilled, so it pays wages so low that skilled workers will not take or keep the jobs, thus fulfilling and perpetuating the expectation.

A major disparity exists between the highly skilled approach that child care workers believe to be conducive to high quality programs for young children, and the lack of specialized knowledge that most people outside the field perceive to be necessary. Most people assume that anybody can take care of children, or at least any woman can. As we will see in the remainder of this study, the issues of status, education, and quality of child care are inextricably linked and basic to the work that must be done to upgrade this occupation.

Child care people who cannot or do not know how to increase their incomes may seek to increase their education, not only to make themselves more competent but also to increase their status — in their own eyes as well as others. Remember Trudy saying that she was eager to get her 44-hour certificate up on her wall. Sharma, another provider, said:

> I've always seen myself as more than a baby-sitter. I'm a lawyer, and a doctor, and a teacher, and a minister, and a parent. So I want to know more, so I can give more to children. I've taken most of the training courses available to providers.

Bruce felt a conflict between his desire for further education and the lack of recognition he would get for it:

> It was difficult for me to make the decision to work on my Master's — economically, putting out money for a degree that would not do anything for me. I'm already at the top of the salary scale for my position (center director within a larger institution). But I want to create a new program, so, there's incentive. I'll probably need a Master's to hold on to this job. There's a part of me that would like to go to Pacific Oaks, but it's so expensive I can't justify it for what it would bring me.

Some providers and teachers tried to upgrade the status of their work by making their programs more educational for children. Sonia, previously quoted in Chapter 3, described her elaborate kindergarten curriculum of formal lessons sequenced in 20-minute modules. A provider with a group of about eight toddlers conducted a highly academic circle time, including asking two 3-year-olds to point out states on a map of the United States. They had obviously had a lot of practice. As these two examples illustrate, many teachers and providers do not understand how young children learn, so when they attempt to make their programs educational, they actually make them less appropriate for children's needs.

Early Childhood Education is the Lowest of the Low. Molly complained:

> When we've been saying to the parents since the child was two years old that the child is in trouble and needs something to be done, perhaps a referral, the parents don't pay attention. But when he goes to kindergarten, and the kindergarten teacher says the same thing, then it's serious. . . .
>
> Another thing: The Ed School is the lowest-prestige school on campus [at the local university]. Definitely lower than communications or natural resources, or the other fields that people look down on. Within the Ed School, Higher Ed is the highest, Secondary Ed is next, then Elementary Ed. Early Childhood is the lowest of the low — in the quality of the faculty, in the amount of money available for financial aid, in the office furniture. I bet it's true at other universities too. That's a reflection of how these different fields are valued by society.

Family child care providers would add another hierarchy: school-based and institution-based child care have the most prestige, then other child care centers, then large family child care homes; small family child care homes are the lowest of the low.

Child Care Workers are Treated Like Domestics. Annie said parents treated her like a maid. Shannon said she must serve the parents. Jane said she feels like an underclass citizen. Michele insisted that she did not believe her work was menial even though others did. Chapter 6 will explore child care's relationship to domestic service.

Anger and Indignation. When people spit the word "baby-sitter" as they examine the very low value society places on child care as work, they are often angry and indignant. Those interviewees who were most aware of their anger were preparing to leave their jobs: Annie, Barry, Jane, Shannon, and Cindy. I think these five people were satisfied with their jobs at the beginning, but bitterness crept in as they dealt with their frustrations about their low incomes and status. Each of them found it appalling that society could so undervalue this important work. To write these feelings off as "burnout" is to trivialize them and blame the person instead of the job. These people who care very much about young children are angry that others do not care more about them. They truly believe that the early years are formative and that good early childhood programs do make a lifetime of difference, especially for less privileged children. It wounds their sense of justice that our society spends so much on other priorities and so little on young children.

Others, maybe half, also blame parents. Parents should know better. Parents should understand how important child care is, and should be able to see how much these good workers put into their work. Parents who drive around in fancy cars and send their children to second-rate child care bewilder and sometimes infuriate these child care workers. On the other hand, some interviewees saw parents struggling against financial hardship to do right by their children, as well as they knew how.

Mrs. Carlisle, a center director, also expressed indignation at society's undervaluing of early childhood workers. She began her interview by saying that she would talk to me

> about anything that would raise the prestige of the day care profession. We need to raise up the early years of the education spectrum. . . . When you think of the

> importance — we are the primary caretaker for most these children, and they are doing their primary bonding with us. We become in essence an extended family. But we don't get any respect as a profession.

But Mrs. Carlisle, director of a church-sponsored program, was not considering leaving her job. In fact, she was one of the few child care center employees I interviewed whom I expect to stay in the field indefinitely. Two factors seem to distinguish her from the previous five people. She fell on the earlier side of the feminist watershed and is content to be dependent on her husband's income, and as his wife she probably also assumes his status level. Her job is most likely viewed by her friends and family as charity work for her church, an appropriate role for an educated, upper-class woman. This does not carry the stigma felt by others who perceive their social identities to be shaped by their *own* work.

Bitterness, Resignation, and Passivity. While most of the interviewees chafe under the lack of respect society pays their work, only a few expressed direct anger about the overall situation. More often they sounded resigned or bitter, especially when they explored their feelings enough to get beyond passive resignation. Only Annie seemed fully aware of the tendency for child care workers to internalize society's negative values even though they contradict their own values: "Because the world devalues day care workers, then day care workers devalue day care workers." She was just about to leave her job, and she was more reflective about her feelings around the status issues than anybody else. Did many others experience the same phenomenon? I think so.

Consider the pattern that so many of the interviews took: first the good news. Only after the satisfactions were well established did the dissatisfactions emerge. Was that because these people did not feel justified in complaining? I think so. In fact, even Annie, whose interview is one long lament, kept trying to justify why she was quitting the field. She seemed to feel guilty about abandoning it, because it was important work, and kids need *someone* to help them "get their egos together." Others seemed not to have thought about the way society's negative image had an impact on them. There is a human tendency not to face up to something that you are not going to change, or cannot change. This is another reason most people said they liked their jobs — they weren't looking for another job, so they must like the one they have.

Bill Ayers, in *The Good Preschool Teacher: Six Teachers Reflect on Their Lives* (1989) addresses this issue. Quoting Daniel Lortie (1975), he notes that the low status of teachers creates

> a kind of denial of self, a discourse that is "self-accusing rather than self-accepting" (p.159). Each of the teachers in this study is articulate and precise in her condemnation of the low status of teaching and is acutely aware of the ways preschool teaching is further devalued and of the even further gradations and degradations of day care and family day care. And yet, ironically, each has also internalized aspects of the lowly status and each participates in subtle ways in a kind of self-condemnation. For example, I discovered that each was surprised that someone wanted to study her, and in the beginning a common concern that the teachers had was that they would have nothing to contribute. (p. 134)

I too found that many people had internalized aspects of the lowly status and participated in subtle ways in self-condemnation. However, perhaps because I am a women so they understood why I would be interested) they had the opposite reaction to my wanting to interview them; almost to a person they felt "It's about time someone wanted to know about this." Many were filled with gratitude that someone wanted to tell their stories. The unspoken question is, why weren't *they* telling their own stories?

The sense of resignation felt by most of the interviewees and the passivity of many was the clearest sign of self-condemnation. (For example, one teacher said she and two other teachers at her center had discussed the possibility of unionizing, "but no union had ever approached them.") These workers have condemned themselves to swallow their dissatisfactions. Or, if this becomes unacceptable, they quit, leaving work that in many ways they love (and often have invested time and money training for), and leaving behind the children whom they feel deserve better. It is hard to understand why child care workers have not been more vocal about their frustrations with salary and status problems, given the intensity that is obvious even in the printed texts in this chapter. This is discussed in the Conclusion.

The Status of Public School Teachers

Dan Lortie, in *Schoolteacher* (1975), reports that the first teachers in the United States were men. Alhough they were highly respected, they were not well paid. As the availability of public education spread throughout the country during the second half of the Nineteenth Century, women teachers were hired in increasing numbers. Lortie argues that the relatively low salaries, especially at times when there was an increased demand for teachers, caused the transition in the gender of teachers. Women teachers became the norm — outnumbering men in the occupation by two to one by 1870. As teachers, and particularly women teachers, became more common, the teaching profession diminished in prestige.

Lortie (1984) observed that teachers do not move up in status as they gain experience, contrary to most other careers of college-educated workers. A teacher's duties are nearly identical from the first day on the job to the last. There is virtually no career ladder within the field. A recent-college-graduate teacher may feel satisfied with her status compared to her peers, but as the years go by they will tend to advance in their careers and she will be left behind.

Another apparently large decrease in the status of teachers has come about in the last 20 years. In 1969, 75% of the general public agreed that teaching would be a desirable career for their children; in 1980, only 48% still agreed with that statement (Gallup, 1986). Several cultural changes during that time have contributed to the devaluing of teaching as a career.[4]

Early childhood teachers suffer from status problems similar to those of public school teachers, but to a greater extreme. All female-dominated occupations are devalued. And in our society and most others, early care and education is considered unskilled labor which can be carried out by anybody, or at least by any woman.

A third reason for the lower status follows from the first two: since child care teaching is thought not to require much skill, and since it is not well paid, there are few educational requirements — although as seen in the Introduction, child care teachers are in fact more educated that the average worker.

Pettygrove, Whitebook, and Wier observed that:

> the majority of [child care] workers . . . see themselves as highly skilled people. Many have invested years in educating themselves to become high quality caregivers. It may be overwhelming to recognize how little society values these skills and educational qualifications. Workers must either re-evaluate perceptions of child care as skilled work, or confront our low social status and challenge it. The latter choice involves questioning society's basic priorities and engaging in a steep uphill battle (1984, p. 19).

If the trend toward lower education requirements continues, workers will see themselves as less highly skilled. And young children will have less skilled care and education.

Workload and Stress

The third type of dissatisfaction shared by some but not a majority of child care workers is work overload. Some also feel high levels of stress.

Workload

A theme that runs through most interviews is the degree of strenuousness of child care as work. The ways in which people talked about the hard work includes several components:

- *It is psychologically wearing* - I have to be on my toes every moment, always anticipating needs, watching out for potential trouble and preventing it before it occurs; I have to juggle a lot of different levels of concerns at the same time (preventive discipline/guidance, coordinating smooth flow of activities and transitions, watching for teachable moments and maximizing their opportunities, handling delicate interpersonal relations with staff and parents); I have to "wear a lot of hats," many at the same time (teacher, nurturer, friend, administrator, counsellor, nurse, scientist/artist/writer, . . . carpenter, plumber . . .)
- *It is constant, incessant* - There is never a minute to sit down, to collect your thoughts, to go to the bathroom.
- *It is physically wearing* - I'm on my feet all day long, hustling, running a lot of the time, carrying heavy children.

For most, the hard work is part of the challenge and they do not seem to mind it as long as they also get rewards. Jane captured what many seemed to be feeling when she said "You give a lot. The thing that counts, that makes you stay with it, is that you get a lot in return."

But if people are dissatisfied with the income and/or status, they also begin to resent the hard work. Several mentioned hard work at the end of their list of complaints — it's very hard work to do for little money and no respect. If it were an easier job, that would tip the balance scale toward satisfaction.

As seen in the Introduction, many child care workers, especially family child care providers, work very long hours compared to other occupations.

Workload is one of the few topics where the factor of age appeared relevant in the interviews. Two center workers in their 40s said they were too old for the sacrifices, physical or mental, that their jobs required. One toddler teacher said her back was not strong enough to carry children around any more.

Family child care providers sometimes found it stressful to work with their own children (Bollin, 1989). While many began this work so they could be home with their children, this did not always prove to be easy. For two providers, problems were severe enough to be defined clearly in the interviews.

Stress and Burnout

We saw in Chapter 1 that some child care workers find their jobs the source of stress and "burnout." Several teachers and directors talked about the stress of their jobs. Interestingly, most of these people worked in child care centers, not family child care; the providers I interviewed did not seem to experience the same levels of stress as center-based workers. (Again, the sample size in this study is too small to imply generalizability of this finding.)

Stress. Here are excepts from several interviews:

- One teacher said "It's a high stress job. Our room is too small for the number of kids we have. There aren't enough teachers, or rather there's too many kids. There's a lot of burnout because we're so cramped together. It's noisy. Sometimes they start screaming and we want to scream too."
- Another said, "I would like to be out of the classroom for a while. I work for 7 1/2 hours straight with the kids. We can't take breaks, all three of us are needed non-stop to make the staffing work. . . . The more kids we have on [state reimbursements] — the more problematic and troubled the kids — and the harder it is. The effects of being poor show up in the parents and in the kids. I hate to say it, but it does."
- A third teachers said, "There's so much misunderstanding about what child care workers do. When our sponsoring institution evaluated the teachers' jobs for a comparable worth review, they classified it as 'routine work' and used 'sitting in the park' as an example of what teachers do. We need parent education about what it takes to work in child care. Parents say 'I wish I could just play with kids all day.' They don't know how strenuous it is."
- One teacher mentioned how hard it was to deal with all the new teachers, because many stayed only for a month or two.
- One director and one teacher fantasized about jobs with breaks. One said, "I'd like to go to an office. Sit down. Drink coffee." Another said, "I'd like a job where I could stop and have a cup of tea."
- Several providers and teachers mentioned how hard it is when you have a child who cannot be consoled. (This is a major stressor of child care workers who work with very young children who were born substance-addicted.)
- The only family child care provider complaint in this category was: "My biggest problem is that I'm not used to being at home. I like dressing up. I have to get out, get around people. I'm in Business and Professional Women, I make phone calls, I'm director of 13 regional offices. That's my big outlet. It gives me a chance to put on clothes and go."

The lack of benefits causes stress: no vacations, no sick days, no breaks. It's stressful not to have health insurance, especially for parents, or not to have a pension, especially for older people.

Unpaid Overtime. The Michigan survey showed that many directors work several hours of (unpaid) overtime each week; the lower the position the less overtime worked.

- One director said that she was thinking about quitting her job because she didn't have time to date. Another said that it was OK when she was single, she could take her children with her when she had to work evenings or weekends, but now that she was remarried, she was thinking of looking for another job.
- As described earlier, several directors referred to the stress of trying to hire teachers in these days of the teacher shortages. Barry, who was exasperated and exhausted by his director's job, and in the process of leaving, said "I'm glad, frankly, to be out of the position of being responsible for 100 kids every day, and supervising a total staff of 30."

Family child care providers have two particular sources of stress. One is that they work such long hours. Trudy's first child arrived at 5 a.m., and the last one went home at 6 p.m., making a 65-hour work week before she did her grocery shopping, some of the child care cooking, and record keeping and billing! On average, providers were open from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., making a 55-hour week of child care, plus the other tasks. Some providers manage to get all the children napping at the same time after lunch, and then have their only break. For others, there are babies or older children to be tended to while the others are napping. Remarkably, none of the providers complained about their long hours. Perhaps the fact that they work at home makes it less stressful to work long hours. Or perhaps they take for granted that it is one of the prices one must pay for the satisfactions of doing this work.

Another major source of stress for providers, unless they build in ways to overcome it, is the loneliness and isolation. Contact with friends and relatives through phone calls or visits brought relief. Some belong to provider associations and speak to other providers regularly on the phone. As quoted above, Trudy's providers group helps her remember that her work is important. Eula's Business and Professional Women gives her a professional identity as well as allowing her to "put on clothes and go." Sharma had a "buddy," another provider with whom she exchanged a daily phone call to share their stories and intentionally consult with each other on problems with children and parents.

Finally, especially for the single parents, poverty is stressful. As mentioned in the section on income, many child care workers must hold second jobs. Many have cars that break down repeatedly, or cannot afford a car. Busy women with higher-paying jobs can purchase services to make their lives easier, and consequently not have to spend much time shopping, cooking, or going to laundromats. Perhaps providers experience fewer problems of this type because they work at home.

Only a couple of interviewees showed signs of burnout, probably because this type of behavior would tend to disqualify people from being recommended for an interview as "good" teacher-caregivers. But Annie has a textbook case of burnout. The following excerpts from her interview, some of which have been quoted earlier, illustrate classic burnout:

> Sometimes I feel too old to do this, too old to be with 3-, 4-, and 5-year olds. It has to do with my patience, my tolerance level. My loving feelings are still sort of in me, but they're not always as readily accessible. I have less tolerance for noise, and want to have my own structure. So, those things make me think of leaving day care. . . .
>
> For me, the big thing is that it's very wearing. It's not very satisfying. It's very hard to make little money, and get little respect. . . . The day in and day out routine is stressful, *wearing*. Sometimes I'll drive to work and it will be five minutes to nine. I have this thought come into my head: "I don't think I can do this today. I can't walk through the door, and see those children, and be my best self for several hours. I'm too tired. Being "on," being my best self, non-stop.

In *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Arlie Hochschild (1983) describes a form of stress that she calls "emotional labor" experienced by workers whose jobs require them to express feelings that may be contrary to their actual emotions. She found that airline stewerdesses were expected to project a warm, empathic personality. They were require to suppress their own anger while difusing the anger of passengers. While I expected to find signs of caregiver resentment over having to feign emotions, Annie was the only interviewee who described such a feeling — having to be "on," her best self for several hours. Others who were burned out also had to push themselves through the motions of their jobs, a more common form of emotional labor.

Barry sounded burned out as he talked about his discouragement in trying to keep his center staffed. And Deb is heading toward burnout as she cannot grow in her job but stays in it for the union salary while she waits for her tenth year when her pension will be vested. On the other hand, Rosie pointed out that she sees stay-at-home mothers getting burned out in their boredom, whereas she was "getting paid every week for something wonderfully enjoyable and fun for everybody." Burned out workers are sometimes blamed for not maintaining their enthusiasm, but they are responding to structural inadequacies of their jobs, and indeed the occupation.

In the Introduction we saw that stress and burnout is mitigated when workers have autonomy, creativity, and a voice in decision making, good staff-child ratios, breaks and vacations. My interviews verify these findings for child care workers, and I would add that burnout is also reduced by close, supportive relationships with colleagues and/or parents, and by identification with the wider profession through provider associations, AEYCs (the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and its state and local affiliates), and similar groups. My interviews indicate that work overload exacerbates dissatisfaction with income and/or status, and together they contribute to burnout. One final contributory factor is lack of opportunity for advancement.

Dead-End Jobs

Shannon, in describing why she planned to leave her job said, "Child care is nothing but dead end and heart-break." Deb, biding her time, felt that there was "no place for her to grow." She wanted to assist in some of the center's administration, but her union contract would not allow it. Shannon had succeeded in changing her job so that she did not work with children all day long. She was given planning time to develop an environmental education curriculum for her center, and other child care groups that came to visit the nature area adjacent to her center. But her salary remained the same, and her status didn't change in the eyes of her father or her friends. Her job still felt like a dead end. Keisha said:

> I'm as far as I can go on the ladder here. I wouldn't want to be the director, it's too stationary for me. I want to go back to school and get a speech pathology degree. When I was student teaching at the university I was in a language-delayed class. It was a lot of fun, doing the testing, and 1-on-1 with the children. It's more money, it's not the same thing year round. And I can still work with the young ones that I like.

Similarly, directors Linda, Susan, Cindy, and Barry felt that they had gone as far as they could go. The bigger the center, the more likely it is to have a range of jobs that allow advancement, but the top is still not a high-level job.

In family child care, severe limits constrain career growth (Modigliani, 1989a). A provider can start with just a few children and eventually expand to a large home with other employees. (Some providers would argue that this is different from, but not a step up from, a small home. Also it should be noted that in expanding they have to give up the very intimacy and lack of institutionalization that likely drew them to this work.) This growth will probably increase her income and perhaps her status. Providers can raise their rates a bit as their reputations in the community grow. Providers who offer government-reimbursed care are limited to one, usually very low, rate. Increasingly, agencies that offer provider services (training, recruitment, resources) are hiring ex-providers in those jobs. Among the providers I interviewed, one had previously worked as a center teacher and one had been a public school teacher. The large-home providers had all started with small homes. Among the center staff, two had previously been providers. The concept of a meandering path or lattice is more appropriate than a ladder for this occupation.

The problem here is the lack of opportunities for advancement. It's not that there is *no* career ladder, but that the bottom of the pyramid is very broad, with many workers. It's fairly easy for a talented assistant to become a head teacher, unless she does not have the educational qualifications, but there are few directors' jobs. Several teachers, when describing their career plans, said that if they stay in the field they hope to direct their own center some day. One experienced director said she wished she could get paid for all the time she spends helping new directors with their problems. A provider can expand, but only as much as the size of her house and state regulations allow.

Some directors had given up their chosen occupation of working with children, sometimes reluctantly; others are happy to move on to a new set of challenges. Movement to a better center represents a career step up, but the number of ordinary centers with low salaries are numerous in comparison to the few special or glamorous centers with relatively high salaries. There are a few related jobs in child care resource and referral, parent education, local or state government, corporations, and college teaching or research.

Some of the interviewees, especially those with the most talent, ambition, and education, have managed to keep their work challenging through creative career moves. People meander in and out of various roles in response to changing circumstances, interests, and opportunities. Wheelock College, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and others have begun to talk about how to build opportunity for advancement into the field.

The Role of Insufficient Funding

The problems with child care as an occupation as summarized by the providers, teachers, and directors in this study can be subsumed under one basic cause: not enough money. Insufficient funding causes:

- low incomes and benefits,
- lack of respect (which in turn causes insufficient funding),
- work overload because of inadequate personnel budgets,
- high caregiver turnover,
- too-high ratios of children to adults, and
- most other problems in child care.[5]

As discussed in Chapter 1 and Appendix A, because most child care in the past was provided informally by women for free, our culture has not yet understood how much effort child care takes, what level of skill is necessary to do it well, or how much money it takes to pay for that effort and skill. Early care and education is not yet paid-in-full. Instead it subsidized by the low wages and benefits of the workers.

Child care workers across all settings also pay a price to subsidize their inadequate budgets. When teachers do not have breaks or subs, it is seldom because the director is a tyrant. It's because there's no money in the budget to cover these items, and the provider or director feels, rightly or wrongly, that parents cannot pay more. The abysmally low reimbursement rates that most states pay for subsidized child care are not enough to support a minimally adequate budget.

To sort through the economic situation and to identify possible solutions, it is necessary to understand child care within the context of traditional women's work and women's labor economics. The next chapter examines this context.

Notes to Chapter 4

1. The income figures reported in this chapter are from late 1987 or early 1988, unless otherwise noted. To adjust for inflation to 1992, readers should add about 20%.

2. Thanks to Margaret Boyer, Minneapolis Child Care Workers' Alliance, for this theme's title.

3. Caroline Zinsser in her interviews of white working-class Irish and Italian providers reports that these people do identify themselves as baby-sitters. I have heard other very informal and isolated providers refer to themselves by this term, but many more have been irritated or infuriated by it.

4. In recent times, schools have become more like factories, substituting efficiency and accountability for the teacher's creative teaching. What was once a "calling" has become a "job." Changes in older students' attitudes have made teaching less rewarding. And there seems to have been a loss of respect for education in this society. I speculate that this is partially a response to the materialist ethic which dominates our culture today. Also, an education no longer carries with it the promise of success, while conversely the modern American hero is not usually a highly educated person.

5. It should be noted that child care resource and referral agencies and other child care-related agencies are often similarly underfunded for the important work they do, and their workers feel stresses that are parallel to those of people who work directly with children. For example, in one city I went to "the R&R" to identify some interviewees. While waiting for my appointment, I overheard a parent counsellor on the phone. Ten seconds into one call, she started hyperventilating. It turned out that she was talking to a low-income parent who needed infant care immediately, and the counsellor knew that she would not be able to find any appropriate options for her.

CHAPTER 5

CHILD CARE LABOR ECONOMICS
WOMEN'S WORK AND MARKET FAILURE

> The Lord spoke to Moses and said, "When a man makes a special vow to the Lord which requires your valuation of living persons, a male between 20 and 60 years shall be valued at 50 silver shekels. If it is a female, she shall be valued at 30 shekels." [Lev.27:1-4]
>
> The biblical practice of setting the value of a woman's work at about three-fifths that of a man's seems to persist into modern times.
>
> (Corcoran, Duncan & Hill, 1984)

Ask anybody why child care wages are so low and they will tell you — "It's women's work." And women have always done it for free. This chapter examines the nature of women's work from the perspective of labor economics. It begins with a somewhat technical examination of the theory and research pertaining to the disparity between women's and men's wages for all types of occupations. It traces the historical roots of this disparity and recent efforts to reduce pay inequity. Finally, it examines the labor economics of child care in light of domestic work and other forms of home work.

The Gap Between Women's and Men's Wages

From the time of Moses until the last decade or two, the value of women's paid work was set at about three-fifths the going wage for men. While in the last two decades we have eliminated the first third of this pay differential, deeper structural problems endure and will probably show more resistance to change.

Across all fields, women's work does indeed pay much less than men's work. The average wage of full-time female workers is currently 70% of the male wage (Nasar, 1992), up from 56% in 1973 (Ehrenberg & Smith, 1988). White women earn between 61% and 71% of the wages earned by comparably educated white men; black women earn 4-8% less than comparably educated white women.

The pay differential is lowest among young workers because traditional women's jobs involve few if any promotions:

> Although white males, for the most part, receive increases in annual earnings as they grow older, income profiles show that women in their late twenties earn as much on the average as do older women.
>
> (Samuelson, 1989)

Women who have graduated from college earn less for working full time than men who have graduated from high school (Bergmann, 1986).

Fringe benefits too are lower for women workers, because women are concentrated in low-wage jobs that often do not pay for health insurance, pensions, or other benefits. Women are also more likely to work for smaller firms, which tend to pay less in benefits. (Bergmann, 1986)

While the gender earnings discrepancy is steadily declining, it remains substantial. Some women are getting paid more than women used to earn, usually because they have chosen "men's jobs." Yet, occupational segregation by sex has barely decreased among white workers in the last few decades. Although it has decreased among people of color, it still remains high (Treiman & Hartmann, 1981).

Segregated Occupations

Even though many women, like men, are now working full-time for most of their adult lives, they do not work in the same occupations. Almost half of all employed women work in occupations that are at least 80 percent female (Rytina, 1981, quoted in Reskin & Hartmann, 1986). They are segregated into the female ghettos of "pink collar" jobs.

It is clear that work gets paid less if women do it:

- When the wages of those occupations considered "men's jobs" are compared to those of "women's jobs," controlling for education and experience, women's wages are significantly lower (Blau & Ferber, 1986).
- The more an occupation is performed by women, the less it pays (Treiman & Hartmann, 1981).
- When men work in predominantly female occupations, they are paid significantly more than women in the same jobs (Bergmann, 1986). Although men who work in predominantly female occupations earn less than men in the male occupations, they earn more than the women in those same jobs (Nasar, 1992).

Additional segregation occurs within occupations from one workplace to another — many occupations are gender-integrated overall, but segregated within individual workplaces. For example, there are waiters and waitresses, but restaurants tend to hire one or the other. (Which would you expect to see at an elegant restaurant, and which at a diner?) Similarly, sales representatives in business are 85% male, whereas those in retail apparel are 77% female (Bergmann, 1986).

Around the world from one culture to another, there are men's jobs and women's jobs, but which gender is assigned to what kinds of work varies greatly. The explanation for job segregation lies in cultural and political factors. Matthaei (1982) argues convincingly that you cannot distinguish men's jobs from women's jobs by looking at the content of the work, or the place where it is performed, or its working conditions. The jobs assigned to one sex may change from one region to another, or over time. The one consistent exception is that across cultures, women tend to do tasks that are compatible with child care — those that are close to home and that can be interrupted.

The Dual Labor Market

Not only are men and women in different jobs, but the nature of the two types of jobs are different. Doeringer & Piore (1971; Piore, 1971) identified a dual labor market composed of two different types of jobs:

- The primary labor market, characterized by high wage, steady jobs with good benefits and opportunities for upward mobility. White men dominate this segment of the labor market.
- The secondary labor market, characterized by low wage, unstable, dead-end jobs with few if any benefits and are seldom unionized. Women and people of color are concentrated in these jobs.

"Women's jobs" are typically found in the secondary labor market, characterized by low pay even if high levels of skills are required. As we have seen, women do not tend to get paid higher salaries as they get older; career ladders in traditional women's jobs do not exist or they are very short. Workers in women's jobs must usually pay for their own training. In addition to higher incomes and better fringe benefits, the primary segment is characterized by highly developed internal labor markets — with predictable rules and channels for advancement.

Education and experience lead to greater pay levels. This is in stark contrast to the secondary market, where education and experience are worth very little (Treiman & Hartmann, 1981).

Because the primary and secondary labor markets are segmented and often segregated, men's and women's jobs do not compete with each other, thus allowing a two-tiered wage structure. Additional research has supported this basic finding (Treiman & Hartmann, 1981; Reich, 1984). Some economists argue that, in addition, women's jobs are crowded with workers, keeping wages low because many workers are competing for relatively few jobs compared to the less restricted, traditionally male spheres (Bergmann, 1986).

Women's Lesser Sense of Pay Entitlement

The work of Brenda Major (1989) suggests that women expect less pay than men.

> The gender segregation of jobs and the underpayment of women and women's jobs lead women and men to use different comparison standards when evaluating what they are entitled to receive in terms of pay for work. I argue that gender differences in entitlement contribute to toleration of injustice among underpaid female workers, foster cultural beliefs regarding what is appropriate pay for male and female workers, and serve as sources of potential bias in job evaluation plans. (p. 99)

She has found that disadvantaged groups use different comparison referents than do white men to estimate what they deserve to be paid. She identifies four social structural inequalities that contribute to the tendency for men and women to differ in their pay expectations:

- the gender segregation of jobs
- the underpayment of women workers
- the underpayment of women's jobs
- gender inequalities in opportunities and responsibilities

People are likely to compare themselves to others similar to themselves, so women compare themselves to other (underpaid) women. Major's research implies that, to decide what level of earnings are fair, child care workers would consider:

- the pay of other child care workers
- the pay in other traditional women's jobs
- their own past pay history
- their estimation of what is realistically attainable given

  their restricted job opportunities and greater home responsibilities

I would add one more:

- their consideration of what they think parents and government agencies can afford — we have seen that home- and center-based caregivers believe that their fair wage depends on parents' ability to pay.

Major (1989) cites findings from three studies that suggests that women also allocate rewards differently than men do:

> When asked to divide a joint reward between themselves and a co-worker, men take more of the reward for themselves, and give correspondingly less to the co-worker, than do women having the same performance level. . . .

> After working on the same task for the same time period, women paid themselves less money and reported that less money was fair pay for their work than men did. . . .
>
> Women worked significantly longer, did more work, completed more correct work, and worked more efficiently than men both when they believed their work was monitored and also when they believed it was unmonitored. (pp. 106-107)

The consequences of such attitudes include women's tolerance of their own injustice and the cultural devaluation of the worth of women's work. Objectively underpaid women may not perceive their pay as unjust. Crosby (1982) found that women are concerned about the underpayment of other women — women in general, but they do not feel income-deprived as individuals.

The implication of these findings for child care is that directors, mostly female, pay themselves humbly, and this sets a low ceiling on salaries at the center. Teachers and assistants in their centers are then paid accordingly less. Both centers and homes use the currently inadequate market rate to set their fees. In the study of the economics of family child care now underway at Wheelock College, we are finding that providers also use families' ability to pay as a major consideration in setting their fees.

The Increasing Value of Women's Pay

Although women's pay is still only about 70% the pay of men, women do get paid a lot more than they used to. After correcting for inflation, the "real wages" of women have climbed steadily since 1890, so that today an hour of women's paid work is worth four times as much as it was a century ago (Bergmann, 1986). Thus it is becoming progressively more costly for women *not* to work. They consider what economists call "opportunity costs" when making work decisions ("I can't afford *not* to work").

A look at the historical roots of occupational segregation and pay inequity lays the context necessary for understanding child care as an occupation.

The History of Women's Labor Economics

Before the Industrial Revolution, the extended family was the dominant economic unit in U.S. society. Production of the necessities for survival was the main function of the family, and families were largely self-sufficient. All family members except infants contributed to the work that needed to be done, and all were seen as productive. Women's and men's jobs were role-defined, but they were seen as complementary; men and women were highly dependent on each other's work for day-to-day functioning (Blau & Ferber, 1986; Matthaei, 1982).

Industrialization

In the first stages of the Industrial Revolution, male workers were drawn to urban factories from rural areas. Some of the daughters of farm families also went to work in factories until they got married (Safa, 1986). According to 1890 census data, 41% of single women worked outside the home, compared to 5% of married women, although these figures underestimate the number of women who did seasonal work.

Before the Industrial Revolution, women's labor was integral to economic production. But as men gathered at the new public workplaces, women stayed within the family's confines. When the Census Bureau began to enumerate occupations, they did not include housewives. During the 1800s, housewives became relegated to the category of dependents supported by their husbands, along with young children, the sick, and the elderly. Most economists have "chosen the trivial method of identifying work with income-generating activity and shunned the household as 'uneconomic.'" (Schor, 1991, p. 85)

Although expected to stay at home, working class and poor women earned income by taking in laundry, boarders, or piecework (Schor, 1991). The paid work done by women was often an extension of what women did at home — 39% of women workers in 1890 were domestics. Of the 8% in the professions, most were teachers or nurses. Of the 25% who worked in manufacturing, most were concentrated in the textile, clothing, or tobacco industries (Bergmann, 1986; Blau & Ferber, 1986). Work in factories was sex-segregated. Women were assigned jobs in the labor-intensive industries such as textile and garment manufacturing (Tilly and Scott, 1978).

As labor was monetarized by the Industrial Revolution, women were paid less than men not only because of their subordinate position in society but also because they were seen, not as bread-winners, but as secondary earners in their families. Consequently, women's work was devalued according to its pay. A woman's status was achieved through her husband or father, not through her own work.

During industrialization, the division of labor by gender involved different economic roles as well as different kinds of tasks — which established men in the public domain and women in the home, and evolved into the concept of the traditional family as we know it today. When men's work moved from home to factory, women became more dependent on men economically, while men became less dependent on women's work.

The "reform movement" in the early Twentieth Century urged all married women, especially mothers, to leave the workplace. Domesticity was touted as superior to paid work for women. "Protective legislation" — laws that restricted women's working conditions and hours — excluded women from many types of skilled labor. These so-called protections in effect "confirmed woman's 'alien' status as a worker" (Hartmann, 1976, p.165) and made women more expensive to employ, giving men a further advantage. Overt discrimination in the form of "marriage bars" prevented married women from jobs that were particularly attractive to middle-class women, like teaching and office work. At the height of this period, married women were barred from teaching in 87% of school districts and 50% of clerical jobs (Golden, 1990). For men of all social classes, it became a sign of success to be the sole wage earner for the family.

Women in the Workforce

In spite of ideology, poor women, especially immigrants, did work outside the home throughout this period. They worked in factories such as the garment industry and they worked at jobs that were seen as a natural extension of women's work at home, such as domestic work. "Nonetheless, exclusive dedication to the role of mother and wife was widely accepted as the only proper and fulfilling life for a woman." (Blau & Ferber, 1986, p.31).

Family size shrunk as children were no longer economically necessary to perform farming chores. Many women purchased food with their husband's paychecks, and hance no longer needed to tend the gardens and farm animals. The arrival of gas and electricity was followed by labor-saving appliances. By 1940, 25% of all women worked; 16% of married women worked.

Until the Second World War, women were denied access to jobs with responsibility, decent pay, promotion, and decision-making power. Most of the women who worked before the 1940s were poor, immigrant, or black. Class discrimination had obscured the concomitant gender discrimination (Kessler-Harris, 1975, 1982). Nonetheless, women working during the war broke down the stringent social barriers to women working, resulting in a subtle but irrevocable shift in public opinion.

Until WWII, it was assumed that men should be paid higher wages than women because men had to support families; women who had children did not usually work outside the home.

When men went off to the war, women were called to replace them in the factories, but most of them willingly returned home when the soldiers came back in need of jobs. Most child care centers that had been established to support working mothers were closed down. During the fifties, a very high 96% of housewives reported themselves to be happy or extremely happy with their lives (Gallup & Hill, 1962, cited in Kessler-Harris, 1982).[1]

The percentage of females in the paid workforce doubled between 1870 and 1940, and doubled again between 1940 and 1986. At the same time, the number of children born to women decreased significantly: women now have one-half as many babies as they did in 1900 and one-quarter as many as they did in 1800 (Bergmann, 1986).

Consumer aspiration rose during the late 40s and 50s, causing some moderate-income women to begin working to contribute their wages toward their families' ability to consume. Kessler-Harris notes a

> dawning recognition within families that women's functions of cushioning depression and fighting inflation, traditionally performed by economies within the household, might be more effectively handled by wage-earning. A woman's income, while still supplementary, and her job, still less than a career, could make the difference between sheer survival and minimum comfort. (1982, p. 299)

The number of women earning college degrees increased dramatically after World War II. Single white women tended to fill the numerous white-collar office jobs that were created during the post-war years. Increasingly the remaining factory and service jobs were filled by women of color.

During the 50s and 60s, the proportion of wage-earning women continued to increase. Federal policy began for the first time to support women working outside the home, although there was no support for ending wage discrimination. America became caught up in the trappings of a consumer economy. Ordinary family "needs" expanded to include cars and appliances and sending the kids to college. Some of those kids were female, and they emerged from college well-educated and ready for highly skilled jobs. Appliances and supermarkets released their time for wage earning.

By the 1970s, women working had become the majority, part of the mainstream. During this decade, women with young children returned to work at rates that stunned the demographers. The cause of gender equality was taken up by the women's movement, inspired directly by the civil rights movement. The word "sex" was added at the last minute to the list of attributes prohibited from discrimination by the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

But the media and the gatekeepers of education as well as jobs — families, teachers, employers — continued to steer each sex toward "appropriate" work. So did peers. Work that is seen as an extension of women's traditional domestic roles, such as nursing or teaching, continues to be underpaid to this day. The economists do not mention child care workers, but even at comparable levels of education they earn about half as much as nurses or teachers. This can be explained by a logical extension of discrimination theory.

When women leave the home to enter the public world of work, they tend to gain status and lead less subordinate lives. But they generally pay the price, essentially working two jobs as they continue to meet the full responsibility for housework and children as well as their paid work. In *The Second Shift*, Arlie Hochschild (1989) documents that most husbands do very little in the way of housework or taking care of the children. In most couples, the husband's career is valued while the wife's job is devalued. Wives put up with this situation in order to save their marriages. Fear of divorce looms large, with economic dependency a big part of this picture. Thus women in this country are bearing ever-greater economic responsibility without corresponding increases in their rewards. Many, especially those with young children live frazzled lives with little time for themselves.

Until very recently, the amount of time spent on housework followed Parkinson's Law, according to Juliet Schor in *The Overworked American* (1991) — the amount of work to be done expands to fill the customary housework schedule. Take laundry for an example. In colonial times, clothes were washed once a month at most.

> Nearly everyone wore dirty clothes all the time. Slowly the frequency of washing rose. When the electric washer was introduced (1925), many Americans enjoyed a clean set of clothes (or at least a fresh shirt or blouse) every Saturday night. By the 1950s and 1960s, we washed after one wearing. (p. 89)

The Feminization of Poverty

Until recently, over 90% of all families included a husband and wife. Today, the increased number of female-headed families have resulted in two out of every three adults in poverty being women. The average income of women-headed families was $14,620 in 1987, compared to $24,804 for single-male families. Furthermore, single mothers' economic status is continuing to decline as the feminization of poverty increases. Half of all full-time female workers are unable to support two children without additional income — only 20% of single fathers require income assistance (Feinberg & Knox, 1990). Diana Pearce (1978) showed that women's increasing poverty has paradoxically accompanied women's greater labor-force participation due to sex segregation in the workplace, which institutionalizes gender inequality and affects all women, not only those already in poverty. Women are also more likely to work in part-time jobs and those with no benefits.

Wiliam Julius Wilson (1987) has described the conditions of life in the under-class, disproportionately young mothers and their children. The social ecology of children in poverty is described by Garbarino (1990) as involving high levels of unemployment, family conflict, lack of health care, lack of resources to cope with crises, and feelings of powerlessness in supporting their children's lives.

Pay Equity and Comparable Worth

The issue of pay equity — equal pay for equal work — did not gain momentum until the 1960s and 70s. Before that time, in spite of the early feminist voices to the contrary, it was widely accepted that men deserved to earn higher salaries because they were responsible for supporting families, whereas women if they worked for pay were only supplementing the household income (Bergmann, 1986). According to the omissions in written reports, women living without husbands or fathers must have been culturally invisible before this time.

The Equal Pay Act of 1963 legislated that men and women doing *equal* work, that is to say the *same* job, must be equally paid. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII explicitly prohibits discrimination in employment practices (including compensation) because of sex. Since 1964, attempts to establish pay equity within the same jobs have made slow, steady progress. But this progress had little effect on women's wages overall because of the segregation of men's and women's jobs. The pay of women engineers, for example, has edged toward equity, but secretaries' pay has remained uninfluenced by this movement. There had been a shortage of nurses for decades but the market forces of supply and demand had not corrected the shortage of nurses because another force — discrimination against women — dampened their effect.

In the 70s and 80s, the strategy of comparable worth — equal pay for *comparable* work — has been used to counteract wage discrimination. The goal of comparable worth is to adjust the pay rates among dissimilar jobs based on the same levels of knowledge, skill, effort, and responsibility required by each. Treiman and Hartmann (1981) point out that the relative worth of jobs is determined by one's values, about which there are no universally accepted standards. Ranking the worth of jobs is particularly tricky because of the highly segregated labor market — how does pharmacology compare to nursing? What occupations are comparable to child care?

Comparable worth studies in a wide range of workplaces have documented the consistent underpayment of females across all occupations, as well as the underpayment of predominantly female occupations. This strategy forces an ideological examination of the value of different kinds of work, often disrupting cultural assumptions about gender hierarchies while empowering women (and people of color) to rethink the value of their work. However, the criteria used to evaluate jobs usually reflect the values and biases of the managers who select the criteria (e.g. the employer described in the last chapter who listed one of the child care workers' responsibilities as "sitting on park benches"). In some cases, the evaluation method has given managers new power to quantify the value or worth of different kinds of work.

> The simultaneous necessity and difficulty of using technocratic means to achieve a just and democratic social transformation remains a paradox at the heart of the issue of comparable worth. (Evans & Nelson, 1989, p. 155)

Nonetheless, comparable worth efforts continue to make inroads into the devaluation of women's work.

Comparable Worth Initiatives in Child Care

Several notable comparable worth cases have stirred the child care world in the last decade (See Appendix A). As large institutions that sponsor child care programs (such as hospitals and colleges) conduct comparable worth job studies, they have been effective in increasing child care wages in the following situations:

- When a program was part of a larger institution that had some financial resources (such as a hospital or a college);
- When the institution was willing to bring the child care program on board as a full-fledged member (rather than eliminating it or contracting services out to an independent group). This includes accepting the employees as "regular" employees rather than as some outgroup.

These studies have consistently found their child care staff to be the most underpaid of all personnel in the institution, demonstrating that wage discrimination is unusually extreme in child care jobs. Overall, a comparable worth approach usually shows that child care workers should be paid about double their current earnings. For example, the average U.S. woman worker in 1987 earned more than twice what child care workers earned in 1988 in the Staffing Study, controlling for education (Whitebook et al., 1989). In Chapter 1 we saw that child care workers were the most or second-most inequitably paid of 503 occupations according to 1980 Census data (National Committee on Pay Equity, 1987).

The Full Cost of Care. The Full Cost of Quality Campaign, sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Worthy Wage Campaign sponsored by the Child Care Employee Project help teachers and providers use a comparable wage approach to determine what they would earn in other jobs in their communities that required similar skills and responsibilities. If the emphasis is on quality, the approach may add group size, staff ratio, caregiver education, and the environment as elements of cost to be reassessed.

We have not yet collected reliable data to assess the full cost of care, but based on preliminary results, I think the full cost based on community-comparable wages would be approximately double current market rates. The Introduction showed that salaries would have to approximately double for trained teachers — salaries constitute typically 60-70% of costs.

Comparable worth initiatives continue to have untapped potential for child care centers or family child care systems that are part of larger, financially secure institutions with an interest in holding on to their child care program.

In conclusion, child care jobs are among the most underpaid even of traditionally female work. Following is an analysis of the two major (and competing) economic theories explaining the sources of women's lower pay.

The Sources of Women's Pay Differential

What are the causes of the different levels of pay for men and women? Economists suggest two basic theories:

- *Market Theory (or Neoclassical Theory)*, which argues that most of the difference in pay stems from "justified" reasons such as women's lesser work experience);
- *Discrimination Theory*, which argues that most of the pay differential comes from discrimination in hiring, promotions, and on-the-job training.

Economists vary widely in their opinions about the degree to which each explains gender differences in pay.

Market Theory

According to market or neoclassical theory — the dominant paradigm in our nation today — the forces of supply and demand determine the price and supply of a product or service and the level of employment and wages paid within an occupation (Becker, 1985; Blau & Ferber, 1986; Polachek, 1981). For example, the availability of child care services adjusts to accommodate parent demand and child care workers' wages adjust sufficiently to attract the necessary workers.

The theory further postulates that workers bring differing amounts of "human capital" to their work: education, training, skills, and work experience. Accordingly, if women and minorities earn less than white men, it is assumed to be because they do not bring the same level of qualifications, or human capital, to their work.

Because mothers give first priority to family needs, market theorists argue, they may stay away from jobs where the responsibilities would make them unavailable to take time off to tend to a sick child or other relative, or go to a parent conference at a child's school. Similarly, they may choose jobs where they can leave and re-enter the labor market with relative ease, so that they can follow their husbands if they want to move or meet other family responsibilities.

Because employers believe that women will be less committed to their work, they prefer to hire women for jobs requiring little on-the-job training. These jobs tend to pay experienced workers little more than inexperienced ones, and they do not offer as much opportunity for advancement. (Corcoran et al., 1984; Blau & Ferber, 1986)

In sum, market theorists argue that women's wages are lower than men's because:

- Many women have less work experience because they do not work continuously after leaving school. They are more likely to interrupt their careers to be home with children or fulfill other family responsibilities.
- Some women accept less responsible, lower-paying jobs so that they can take time off when their children are sick or out of school.
- Women may feel less incentive to make sacrifices to acquire new job skills, and they often believe their skills get rusty when they are out of the workforce.

- Many women choose careers that are portable so they can follow their husbands if they move, and jobs that will allow them easy exit and re-entry.

(Corcoran et al., 1984; Blau & Ferber, 1986)

Note that an underlying assumption of this theory is that women's personal choices cause their lower pay. Capitalist cultural values deem it fair for workers to be paid less if they have less training or experience. Mainstream economists usually discount the role that discrimination plays in limiting opportunity for experience and training.

Discrimination Theory

Discrimination theorists argue that social, economic, and political forces influence practices in the world of work in ways that reproduce and perpetuate discrimination — institutional discrimination. Thus, simply by doing things the way they are usually done, people naturally maintain discrimination in their daily worlds of work. Market theorists minimize the influence of these processes.

Discrimination theory argues that such institutional practices explain why women earn much less than men even after adjusting for the differences in the experience and training — the human capital — they bring to their jobs. They find discrimination attributable to four types of causes:

- the segregation of men's and women's occupations,
- the devaluation of work performed by women and people of color,
- prejudice in employers, consumers, and co-workers, and
- other prejudice in institutional practices.

Reskin and Hartmann (1986) listed the various causes of occupational segregation by gender, intertwined with the above:

- widely shared cultural assumptions (e.g., "appropriate" activities for each sex at home and at work);
- free choice — women's own preferences, values, and attitudes, deeply rooted in culture and perhaps biology; and
- labor market discrimination — legal or social restrictions (e.g., employers' assumptions about women's priorities about family needs).

These authors concluded that 35-40% of the sex difference in earnings was attributable to the sex segregation of men's and women's occupations.

Research Testing the Theories

Several studies have set out to test the market theory of pay differentials. Reskin and Hartmann (1986) attempted to determine how much of the relatively lower training and experience of women workers is due to their own free choice, their lack of encouragement, or obstacles that limit their opportunities. Longitudinal studies suggest that, contrary to market theory, women who leave and re-enter the workforce are not more likely to choose predominantly female occupations, and that any depreciation of skill levels caused by a worker's leave of absence are quickly repaired. But these researchers did find that women who desire to be available to care for their families do restrict their job choices.

Corcoran et al. (1984) tested human capital theory with data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, a longitudinal study of family economics in a nationally representative sample of American families. They rated the economic value of men's and women's education, work experience, work continuity, work restrictions, and absenteeism. They compared these differences to see how much of the wage gap they explained. They found that, indeed, women's worklives were interrupted more often than men's; they were more likely to work part-time; they tended to restrict their work schedules so they could meet family needs; and many had missed work to care for sick children.

In this study, the most important factors in predicting the wage gap between white women and men were years in present job and proportion of working years employed full-time (i.e., women's earnings are reduced by the number of years that they have worked less than full time). Apparently they did not look at gender influences in occupational choice. Black women are additionally set back by their fewer years of education. Other human capital factors made little or no difference. Contrary to popular opinion, these researchers found that after adjusting for lost experience, labor-force interruptions did not result in lower wages for either women or men — people are not set back by time off. "Rusty skills" are not a problem. Women who worked part time did not earn less per hour than women who worked full time. (Corcoran et al., 1984)

Borjas (1983) found that among federal government workers, women earned 22%-27% less than white men after adjusting for years of education and experience and geographical region. Gender was two or three times more important than race in determining black women's low pay in government jobs.

Treiman and Hartmann conducted a major review study of the subject for the Department of Labor (1981). They found that there is substantial discrimination in women's pay and that women are concentrated in low-paying jobs. They argue:

> Several types of evidence support our judgment that it is also true in many instances that jobs held mainly by women and minorities pay less at least in part *because* they are held mainly by women and minorities. Women are paid less than men even when you control for education experience, commitment, and other differences in qualifications]. (p. 93)

They concluded that less than one-third of the gender wage differential was attributable to differences in human capital characteristics. The other main cause is discrimination (they should include method errors as sources of unexplained influence).

Thus, real differences in women's skills and experience seem to explain less than one-third of the wage gap for white women and less than one-quarter of the gap for black women. The remaining two-thirds to three-quarters of the gap is due to some combination of discrimination against women and remaining reasons not measured, whether "justified" or not.

Market theory assumes that all workers have full access to all opportunities and complete mobility and that employers do not discriminate against any group and have equal access to all workers. Discrimination theory argues that institutional factors in labor markets are rigid and present barriers to mobility. The forces influencing the sex segregation of occupations are embedded in the culture, so they tend to be invisible and taken for granted by most women as well as their employers. They are built into employment policies as well as daily life. If workers are to be able to choose the kind of work they like to do — for whatever reasons — we must identify these invisible cultural assumptions as well as more specific forms of discrimination that work against them.

Labor markets, according to discrimination theory, tend to incorporate, mirror, and perpetuate the subordinate roles traditionally assigned to women and people of color. Women do appear to prefer women's jobs in spite of their low pay. They were socialized to enjoy these types of activities, they feel they are more appropriate and familiar. Some women do in fact choose such jobs because they are more likely to allow for family responsibilities. Women lack role models and information about or access to other jobs.

The wages paid for a particular type of labor become customary in a community, accepted as the standard for each particular type of job — people believe that jobs should pay what others doing the same job are paid. Simple conformity to the "going wage" sets a standard that is biased by the discrimination of other firms in the market, thus perpetuating discrimination. "The beliefs, attitudes, preferences, intentions, and behaviors of all participants, including policy makers, are affected by past differential outcomes related to race and gender." (Wittig & Lowe, 1989, p. 18)

Based on the study of the Department of Labor, Treiman and Hartmann conclude:

> In our view, although the concentration of women in lower-paying jobs exists at least in part because of women's choices, it also results from the exclusionary practices of employers and from the systematic underpayment of jobs held mainly by women. (p. 65)

Julie Matthaei (1982) and Heidi Hartmann (1979) argue that the full force of the capitalist system supports the division of labor between the sexes, which in turn maintains men's superiority over women and keeps women financially dependent on men and performing domestic chores for them. These theorists believe that the gender division of labor must be eliminated both at work and at home before women's position of subordination can be eliminated. Chafetz (1988) adds that men control job access and wages and use their power to perpetuate the power inequities.

Causes of the Low Wages in Child Care

How much of child care's low wages come from real differences in human capital workers bring to the job, versus various forms of discrimination? Education, experience, and commitment are the main sources of difference in human capital.

We know from Chapter 1 that child care workers are on average slightly more educated than the average U.S. worker, though it appears that education level may be declining today as labor shortages cause hiring qualifications to be reduced.

We have no valid statistics for years of experience or commitment, but child care workers may have taken more time than average out of the workforce for their families. Some no doubt chose child care as a job hoping that it would allow them to meet the needs of their families. Indeed, many family child care providers choose this work so they can be home with their own children. Thus, a small part of the low wages could be attributed to these factors, but no other occupation with this level of education pays so little.

The sources keeping child care wages so low are more subtle. Most obvious is that it is a most womanly of women's occupations. Across the country, between 95-99% of child care workers are female (U. S. Department of Labor, 1988; Whitebook et al., 1989). Most of the child care workers I spoke to have not considered "men's" jobs. How many had their career choices narrowed by school counsellors, parents, and others who steered them away from higher-paying careers? How many grew up feeling more comfortable and competent when they were caring for children compared to when they performed "men's" work?

Examples of institutional discrimination were mentioned in many interviewees' stories of how they came to their work. Some interviewees recognize that they have chosen lower pay than they could make elsewhere so that they can do this work. But they resent that taking care of little children should be paid less than menial men's jobs.

In a previous article, (1988), I identified twelve reasons for the low pay in child care:

1. More than 95% of early childhood professionals are women (U. S. Department of Labor, 1988). Wage discrimination in occupations with high percentages of female workers is well documented.

2. Most families say that child care fees "must come out of the mother's paycheck." The inequitable pay received by women strikes a second blow to child care budgets (Zinsser, 1987). Many mothers — themselves poorly paid — feel that "it hardly pays to work, once you've paid for child care" and are unable or unwilling to give over any more of their hard-earned income for fee increases. In such families, the idea that the father's earnings are equally dependent upon paid child care is not recognized.

3. Until recently, this labor-intensive work was usually provided mothers "for free." Thus, it is difficult for many people to understand why child care costs so much, even when it is poorly compensated.

4. Informal family child care providers still offer care at less than a living wage. This sets a low bottom line for child care fees. As long as some providers offer low-cost care, others are pressured by market rate to keep their fees low.

5. Child care is an extremely labor-intensive service. The total income of each teacher or provider must be paid by only a few parents. One worker can take care of only a few young children, compared to perhaps 100 animals or cars per day. And in a consumer society like our own, people tend to pay more for goods than services.

6. Parents' earnings are relatively low. At the time of their lives when they must pay for child care, young parents have less job experience and seniority than the average wage earner, and therefore receive less income. Most single parents have trouble paying today's market rate for care, even though it is inadequate.

7. Families must usually manage child care expenses with little if any support from the government. Only college costs put a similar burden on families; however the government offers extensive grant and loan programs to help pay for college expenses. In all other Western industrialized countries, as well as many Third World countries, governments provide substantial child care assistance to working parents. (Kamerman, 1991).

8. Child care providers are reluctant to raise fees because they understand what a substantial bite child care now takes from the average family's disposable income — only housing usually costs more. As people inclined to take care of others, sometimes to a fault, child care workers sacrifice their own incomes by subsidizing fees through their own lost wages. Many caregivers believe that parents and the government could not pay more for child care, when in fact they would if they were informed of the problems caused by the low pay.

9. Most early childhood professionals enjoy working with young children, and they have been willing to accept low wages in exchange for satisfying work. Often these workers have been women who were willing and able to be financially dependent on their husbands.

10. Child care workers have not usually organized around the issue of compensation. Few child care teachers and fewer family child care providers belong to any related organization. There are few unionized workers because child care workers are pessimistic about where the money for raises will come

from and fear that unions will initiate an adversarial relationship with parents. The small, decentralized nature of most child care programs makes the system structurally difficult to organize.

11. Young children and their needs are devalued in this culture, cherished myths aside. We do not commit resources to children as readily as to other priorities. It is easier to see one's investment in a car than in a baby's care. We do not respect the skills that qualified child care workers bring to their work — "Anybody can watch children. . . ." Many parents and policy makers are unaware of the components of quality care and do not understand its importance to a child's development and well being.

12. Historically, child care as paid labor has been performed by lower-class domestics and servants. Although preschool teachers have sometimes been paid semiprofessional wages since World War II, the majority of child care workers have been relegated to the wage and status levels of menial laborers.

In conclusion, the main reasons behind child care's low pay are due to the inequitable wages of women, the devaluation of children in this culture, and the subsequent minimization of the skill involved in working with children. These cultural values are sustained by the decentralization of the occupation and the accommodating nature of the women who choose this work in the context of the gender and class inequities of our society and public policy indifference to women, children, and families.

The cultural context of child care as work is examined in Chapter 6 and the Conclusion. The remainder of this chapter examines other studies that shed light on how low wages in child care are sustained and perpetuated.

Why is child care so underpaid? We return to the obvious answer, "Because it's women's work." The remainder of this chapter will consider other women's occupations that share interesting common features with child care.

Traditional Women's Work Today

We have seen that traditional women's work pays low wages than men's work. Women's work also sets aside less retirement income, is more susceptible to unemployment, has less on-the-job- training, and lower prestige (Reskin & Hartmann, 1986). Women's work tends to fall in the service industries and it tends not to be unionized.

The Service Industries

Women are most likely to work in the service industries, most of which show all the characteristics of secondary labor market jobs as described above. In our capitalist society, most service work is paid less than so-called productive work. Productive work — likely to be performed by men — yields concrete, lasting products for the marketplace. By their very nature, service-sector jobs tend to have the following characteristics (Gerson, 1985; Daniels, 1989):

- they are done for consumption; they have no tangible

  product, no way of marking their importance
- they are performed in private
- they are infinitely repeated

Child care is viewed in this society as a prototypically service-sector job. Healthy, well functioning children, if seen as products, are seen as the products of their parents' labors. Their teacher-caregivers' contributions are unrecognized.

Knowledge about other low-wage women's occupations sheds light on child care as an occupation. They are notable in their lack of unionization, a characteristic of secondary-labor-market occupations.

Non-Unionized Workers

The decentralized, non-unionized women's occupations are the lowest paid in the U.S. A look at some other industries points out additional relevant factors for this phenomenon. Safa's study of the garment industry (1986) finds a high percentage of low-paid female workers, most of whom work in small shops or do piecework at home. Unlike most other U.S. industries, garment manufacturing has remained decentralized, much like child care. The decentralization has allowed this industry to avoid unionization and thus to remain low-wage, no-benefit work.

On the other hand, teaching and nursing are two examples of predominantly female occupations that have repositioned themselves away from low-pay, no-benefit work through unionization. While they are still paid less than equitable wages, the problem is not nearly as extreme as in the decentralized, non-unionized women's occupations.

Few child care workers are involved in any kind of professional organizations.[2] A handful of dedicated union organizers have made some progress in a few progressive cities (e. g., Madison, WI, San Francisco, Boston), but they have been unsuccessful at reaching the rank and file. The United Auto Workers (UAW) District 65 has organized centers in several states, including Head Start programs in San Francisco. In Massachusetts, District 65 staff members were instrumental in bringing together a broad coalition of concerned advocates who succeeded in getting strong new budgetary support for employee salaries and parent fee subsidies. (Most of these policies have been eliminated with the current recession and conservative political administration.) New York City has a system of publicly-assisted child care centers whose employees belong to AFSCME, as do the workers in many community college centers. Also in New York City, family child care workers who belong to the subsidized child care system have tried to organize, but a majority of providers were afraid to risk their jobs by joining the union (Personal conversation with Maria Otto, Child Care, Inc., January 15, 1991.)

The recommendations discuss the possibilities for collective organization in child care.

Home Workers

A look at the generic field of work that is done in the worker's home, called "homework," sheds light on some of the special characteristics of family child care as an occupation.

All forms of home work tend to be invisible. When you drive past a provider's house, or a seamstress's or word processor's house, it does not look like a workplace. Sheila Allen (1987) notes that home work has been omitted from most studies of the sociology of the family or the sociology of work. This point can be extended to the field of economics and others as well. The invisibility and lack of institutionalization along with the cultural assumption of the separation of home and work have caused most researchers to ignore the relations of these workers, mostly women, to the world of work. Allen argues that this is in part due to the invisibility of women in all aspects of our culture:

> [It] is not only in social science that women are ignored or marginalized. We live in societies in which women are subordinated as social persons. Their activities

> are marginalized, continuously and consistently, by language, by ideologies, and by material conditions. . . .
>
> Homework is hidden, both as a form of production and as a form of paid work. The persistent invisibility of much of women's economic activity is not specific to homework but is institutionalized through the ideological separation of home and work. (p. 273)

During the last century, the very definition of work changed. It came to been conceptualized as full-time, regular, and paid. Under this concept, unpaid work becomes nonwork. Paid work at home is seen as less than work that occurs in a workplace: "unorganized, informal, marginal, unregulated, peripheral, residual" (p. 258). Home work has usually been ruled as exempt from labor regulation on the grounds that home workers were not real employees. Government officials have not usually been willing to grant the state authority to regulate businesses that are carried out within the privacy of the home. The Bureau of the Census does not recognize "housewife" as an occupation.

Home work is also characterized by low pay, lower than that of the same work done outside the home. Trade unions have generally been hostile to home work, or ignored it. Collective action has seldom been taken by home workers. Consequently home work typically has no employee benefits, no social security, and no regulation.

Approximately half of all child care in the United States that occurs outside the child's home takes place in the provider's home — family child care. Yet, family child care is virtually invisible. In focus groups conducted recently for the National Council of Jewish Women, I have learned that most parents are unaware that there is such a thing as family child care when they began looking for child care, and most providers were unaware of the field when they began thinking about work. Somehow families and providers find each other, but employers and the general public do not tend to know about these arrangements.

Family child care as a special instance of home work fits the patterns described above. There is ample evidence that many parents view of family child care as a less formal arrangement than other business arrangements. For instance, parents are often surprised and even insulted when providers ask them to sign a contract, though a similar procedure is readily accepted in child care centers. When parents are short of money they often simply do not pay their child care bills. They expect to not have to pay for time when their child is absent, even though the provider cannot fill the child's slot with a fee-paying client. They may be outraged if a provider charges for paid vacation time. We have seen that child care workers across all settings feel that their work is devalued and generally unrecognized. Working at home adds to this problem for family child care providers.

Neighbors may ask providers to receive packages or check in on school-agers who care for themselves in the late afternoon — the provider becomes mom-at-home for the whole neighborhood. Providers tell stories about their neighbors taking them for granted. One asked "Have you ever thought about getting a job?"

Margaret Nelson, in her perceptive report on interviews with family child care providers in Vermont observes that

> as women who are simply "at home," [providers] become the repositories of the kinds of expectations for reciprocity that maintain community and kin networks. . . . Yet providers do not always find their work allows them to meet these expectations: They have to protect their work against sociability; they also have to protect in against unpaid reciprocity. . . . The women talk about having to "train" other people not to call them during the day.
>
> (1990, p. 148-9)

Allen found that some of the husbands of home workers expressed a strong preference for their wives to be at home with the children. They also expected their wives to adapt to their husbands' needs. Her interviewees made statements such as "He likes me to be at home when he gets home from work" and "My husband likes meals ready when he gets home." I have heard variations on this theme from many family child care providers over the years, and this finding is confirmed by Nelson as well (1990).

Seen in the light of home work, it is not surprising that family child care tends to pay less than center care, nor that it has been omitted from most research studies of child care, despite the large numbers of children in this setting.

But these factors also characterize child care centers more than most other businesses. Perhaps centers have an element of home-work-once-removed, because women are performing women's work with children.

Domestic Workers

Finally, research about domestic work sheds light on the labor economics of child care. Although domestic workers are paid for doing the work that most women — historically and to this day — do for no pay, they are a subgroup of home workers only recently liberated from the role and status of servant. The antecedents of modern attitudes toward domestic workers can be found in studies of the labor history of servants:

> Traditionally the social history of the lower classes was primarily labor history, which focused on the formation of the modern working class and its eventual emergence into class consciousness and political activity. Historians therefore tended to study only artisans, day laborers, and other heroic precursors of the proletariat. Servants simply did not fit this mold. Their work was economically "unproductive"; their social attitudes were disappointingly deferential; and they rarely left the domestic sphere of the household to take part in politics. Also, many of them were women, an automatic disincentive for study at a time when history was still largely "his story." (Fairchilds, 1984, p. xi.)

Fairchilds' point that domestic service is "unproductive" applies to all forms of child care. After the work is done, there is no product to be seen. This analysis is extended by the Coles in *Women of Crisis* (1978).

In *Between Women: Domestics and Their Employers* (1985), Judith Rollins investigates the psychological relationships between women who work as domestics and the women who employ them. Her findings overlap with mine for both center- and home-based child care workers. Rollins identifies several characteristics of the relationships between domestics and their employers:

> Love, economic exploitation, respect and disrespect, mutual dependency, intense self-interest, intimacy without genuine communication, mutual protection — all of these elements were contained in this extraordinarily complex relationship. But, at its core, the dynamic around which the relationship pivoted was, I submit, maternalism. (p. 179)

Maternalism, according to Rollins, differs from paternalism, which is based upon political and economic power denied to women. Maternalism is related to nurturance and affect, but it is condescending and functions to keep the worker "in her place." The love and respect is not between equals but in the context of a superordinate-subordinate relationship. Maternalism, like paternalism, depends upon seeing the domestic as child-like, which in turn justifies treating her as a child.

Rollins argues that because a domestic is perceived to be performing the work of her employer, she is a surrogate for her, an extension of her. Accordingly, this work occurs under more informal arrangements than other occupations, and the workers are not treated as autonomous employees.

Rollins herself answered want-ads for housekeepers and cleaning women to supplement her interviews of domestic workers. She reports that one of the greatest affronts to her dignity as a person was being treated as if she were not really present. For example, an employer talked to her son about his date the previous evening as if Rollins were not in the room. Another employer turned down the thermostat as she left the house on a cold winter day.

All of these points echo ones made by the child care workers I interviewed. Both kinds of workers complain about being taken for granted and being taken advantage of. Both are confused by the contradictory elements of love and hostility that arise from the intimacy between women in these two roles, center caregivers and some providers are often not close enough to mothers to build the attachment that Rollins found in many domestics.

One of Rollins' points is particularly intriguing when applied to child care workers. Perhaps half of my interviewees seemed to feel treated as subordinates by at least some of the parents of children in their care. The discussion of status in Chapter 4 describes how several interviewees actually used terms like "servant" and "handmaiden" to describe how they felt parents treated them. It is likely that caregivers are viewed as surrogates by some parents. It is logical that mothers especially feel on some level that because they hire someone else to perform their child care, it is less important than the work they do themselves. Similarly, as my interviewees described conversations that occurred among parents, they seemed to feel that they themselves were invisible as Rollins felt treated by her employers.

As the function of child care has left the home it has become a commodity. We have seen that the economics of child care as an occupation can be understood in light of its being a form of service industry and domestic work. A look at market theory as it applies to supply and demand in child care completes the picture.

Market Failure in Child Care

Economists would say that child care in the United States suffers from "market failure." The forces of supply and demand are not operating freely. Earlier in this chapter, we considered the neoclassical explanation for supply and demand of workers in the labor market. Neoclassical analysis would make the following assumptions about the child care industry:

- As the demand for child care increases, the supply of child care services will increase.
- As the demand for services increases the demand for workers, wages will go up so the supply of workers will increase.
- As wages increase, the price of child care will go up and demand will be inhibited. This effect should be strong in child care because wages constitute a substantial part of the costs of production.

The going wage will rise and fall with the demand for care. Everybody willing to work in child care for the going wage will find a job, and all employers who pay the going wage will find enough workers. If wages slip below this equilibrium point, the quantity of labor will be insufficient, so wages will rise.

But child care supply does not respond so facilely to demand. In particular, a shortage of infant and toddler care is common in many if not most communities, but centers and homes have not increased their infant fees to "whatever the market will bear." Other niches of the child care service industry that are not adequate in many communities include children with special needs and before-and-after school care. In other words, only care for 3- to 5-year olds appears in generally sufficient supply.

Several economists have identified factors that contribute to this market failure. Their points are bulleted below.

Hartmann and Pearce (1989) identify two causes for the lack of market responsiveness:

- Some of the benefits of well raised children accrue to the society, or the public sector, but most of the costs of child care in this society are borne by the private sector, largely by parents. Child care is a "*social good,*" *or a "public good,*"" but this is unrecognized, and society contributes little to its cost.
- Cost-benefit signals are not properly sent or received, so the market does not undergo the expected adjustments in quality, quantity, and price.

Families' decisions about which care to choose for their children and how much to pay for it are made with little understanding of cost and its relation to the quality of the service. When parents are informed about these factors, some suggest that fees be raised. Others move their children to a different program. The NDCHS found that 59% of the urban parents they surveyed in 1977-78 were willing to pay more for their current family child care services (Divine-Hawkins, p. 24).[3]

Parents are lacking consumer information. They understand that they should pay for their children to be clean and safe, but they often do not understand the nuances of child development and early education. This knowledge base is what child care workers learn in good training and education programs. It is not readily understood by society at large. Economist Rachel Connelly notes that it may be difficult for families to judge quality, but, theoretically, higher-quality care should be worth more because it contributes to the production of higher-quality children. Child care is a family investment, but parents do not realize the importance of what they are buying (1988).

Culkin, Helburn, & Morris (1990) have elaborated and expanded on Hartmann and Pearce's findings. They add two more reasons for this market failure.

- High quality child care is a "*merit good,*" providing more benefits than families realize — so they spend less on child care than they would if they had full information about its benefits.
- Lower-income families cannot *afford* to pay for high quality care.

Parents who cannot afford quality are not able to demand it.

We saw in Chapter 3 that job satisfaction functions as a non-monetary incentive or alternative compensation for doing this work.

- Providers and center workers settle for low wages and benefits *in exchange for job satisfaction*.

My studies have identified another way that child care responds to forces of supply and demand.

- Child care center administrators and family child care providers *consider parents' needs for affordability,* unlike other businesses (one is tempted to say "real businesses"). Economists would say that these providers' sympathy or altruism interferes with their response to market forces.

It is common for a provider to give a mother a reduced rate even when another family who could pay more could be found. And providers do not raise their rates, even though they could, because "they don't want to take advantage." The Italian and Irish working-class providers in Zinnser's study (1990) and providers in Vermont interviewed by Nelson (1990) confirm that when providers decide how much to charge a parent, they consider the parent's ability to pay as well as how much they themselves want or need to earn.

Behind the economic reasons for the market failure in child care is the failure of the society and its government to assume responsibility for the well-being of its children.

A shortage of good quality child care is also widespread, though this has not been documented. Market theory would predict that good new programs would start up and existing programs with openings would increase their quality to attract those consumers who would be willing to pay more for quality. But in child care, quality is sacrificed to keep costs low. Culkin, Helburn, and Morris (1992) argue:

> To a large extent the *quality* of services is constrained by costs, which in turn are impacted by the competitive characteristic of the industry.
>
> Because the child care industry is relatively young and very competitive, both rapid growth and rapid turnover are characteristic of the market. . . .
>
> These competitive conditions create pressure on providers to reduce costs. Since labor costs represent about two-thirds of total costs, in centers the major way to cut costs is through paying lower wages or reducing staff-child ratios. (pp. 9-10)

Similarly, family child care providers can settle for lower incomes or take more children to cut costs.

Quality is threatened by pressure to keep costs low. Low incomes and lack of training in caregivers, a poor ratio of adults to children, and high turnover all predict low quality.

> Thus, the basic cause of the market imperfections in child care start with the inability or unwillingness of families or society to demand enough quality services. Because of the competitive conditions and the complex nature of services, it is difficult for many providers to improve services on their own unless they have access to unique resources. Market competition will fail to provide sufficient high quality care if left to itself.
>
> (Culkin et al., 1992, p. 10)

In conclusion, the failure of market forces contribute to the low wages, lack of availability, and poor quality. Because the United States leaves child care to the vagaries of market forces rather than planning a comprehensive delivery system, children and their families, as well as child care workers, "pay the price" for this failure.

But at the middle and upper ends, Americans today are over-consuming and under-investing, according to economic analysts. As a nation, we are saving less and spending more than we have in the past, or than do people in other countries. We also invest less in manufacturing plants and civic infrastructure. Fuchs asserts,

> If Americans are underinvesting in general — including underinvesting in children — we would need to consider all the social, psychological, and economic reasons why so much emphasis is placed on the present at the expense of the future. . . .
>
> The impression is often created that underinvestment is the result of some vague, impersonal forces rather than the consequences of the decisions of individual

> Americans in their roles as parents, consumers, workers, stockholders, and the like. . . .
>
> Children are, to some extent, a public good and . . . the entire society has a stake in the potential of the next generation. If Americans do not invest enough in children so that they become healthy, well-educated adults, the country's future is bleak, regardless of progress with other issues.
>
> (1988, pp. 56, 57, 69)

This chapter has shown that women's pay inequity and the further devaluation of traditional women's work today are active forces that keep child care suspended someplace between the world of paid work and that of domesticity. As a consequence, child care has not yet been sufficiently funded. The remainder of the study examines the cultural, social, and psychological contexts that sustain and perpetuate this condition.

Notes to Chapter 5

[1] Of course one can question whether these women were truly fulfilled as housewives, or whether they just gave the socially correct answer of the day. But I can report that a decade later I and my friends believed we were happy as housewives — not for long.

[2] The only major professional organization, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), includes many center directors and college instructors, some teachers, and fewer providers. In the past this group has focused exclusively on the needs of young children and their parents. Concerns about the low salaries and status in the occupation have begun to surface as worthy of NAEYC's attention, but there is also resistance from members who feel passive and hopeless or actively angry at those who raise the concerns. Associations of family child care providers are beginning to develop around the county, but they tend to focus on personal support and training. Neither NAEYC nor provider associations have assumed leadership in organizing for change.

[3] When asked why this finding was not more widely reported, Dr. Hawkins said "We didn't know what to make of it."

CHAPTER 6

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF CHILD CARE

The nature of our economy shapes our cultural values and in turn is sustained by them. Economic and cultural values are so interwoven into our mundane routines that they seem to be predestined. It is hard to imagine that they could be any different. This cultural infrastructure shapes the procedures and norms of our workplaces, the nature of family life, and indeed all our social relations. It supports as well as contains and constrains our daily ways of life.

As we saw in the last chapter, the very fact that early care and education consists of traditional women's work in a sexist culture determines its devaluation. It is written off as something any woman can do. It's done everywhere, every day. Caring for children is almost as natural for women as breathing. When parents or society at large fail to give due respect to the skills and responsibilities of child care workers, or to recognize child care's true and full cost, they are simply carrying out the going cultural imperative.

Similarly, the very fact that our economic system is capitalistic creates social pressure to consume. Heidi Hartmann (1979, 1981) has shown that capitalism and sexism work hand in glove to reinforce and reproduce each other. We have already noted the effects of this double trouble on child care income and status.

How else is the nature of early care and education shaped by cultural values? This question requires careful scrutiny because cultural values tend to be taken for granted, invisible, and usually ignored (Sarason, 1982).[1] In this chapter we examine seven characteristics of contemporary American culture that exert a critical influence on early care and education:

Consumerism

Mothers' Need to Work

Where *Are* the Fathers?

The Cult of Motherhood

The Devaluation of Motherhood

The Devaluation of Children and the Child's Experience

The Commodification of Nurturance and the Massification of Care

Consumerism

Consumerism forms the foundation of modern life in the United States, so we begin with it. Spending more and investing less than ever before, the United States — that is to say its middle- and upper-income citizenry who set the cultural tone — has become possibly the most consumer-oriented society in history (Fuchs, 1990; Schor, 1991). Shopping is the favorite form of entertainment. Men, women, and children are caught up in what Harvard economist Juliet Schor calls the insidious cycle of work and spend.

Americans have come to expect their standards of living to rise from one decade to the next, slowly but surely. While people hardly notice gradual increases in income, they are quick to feel the pain of any deflation. To compensate for the economic downturn which began in 1973, Americans who have the opportunity, including parents of young children, have chosen to work progressively longer hours. After decades of increasingly shorter work weeks, the number of hours worked plateaued at the end of the Second World War, and has begun creeping up again during the last two decades. The productivity of the American economy has doubled since the Second World War — and we have taken the dividend in cash rather than leisure. The average work year today is 164 hours or one full month longer than two decades ago — men are working 98 additional hours per year and women are working 305 additional hours. This trend holds across low, middle, and high income categories for people with and without children. (Schor, 1991)

In spite of a slight downward shift in the value of an hour's work since 1973, American consumerism has continued to grow, thanks to increasing work hours. A good part of the increase in number of hours worked has come from some mothers joining the workforce and others who had been working part time changing to full time. It is only the increase in mother' working hours during the last tow decades that has kept American family income from declining for the first time since the Depression (Levy, 1988). However, with fathers working longer hours as well, *family income continued to rise during the 70s and 80s* (Schor, 1991) — until July, 1990.

The steadily increasing incomes, decade after decade, have driven steadily increasing consumerism.

> The average American is consuming, in toto, more than twice as much as he or she did forty years ago. And this holds not only for the Gucci set but all the way down the income scale. . . . *Compared with forty years ago, Americans in every income class — rich, middle class, and poor — have about twice as much in the way of income and material goods. . . .*
>
> (Schor, 1991, p. 109, italics mine)

This fact seems counter-intuitive because the cultural myth says that families are struggling financially today. As we will see, this is the case for low-income families, who have taken more than their share of the current recession. But middle- and upper-income families are working longer hours and maintaining their spending. Rising standards in what we expect to consume are reflected in the cold numbers:

> The typical 1950s family of four has shrunk to an average of 2.6 persons. . . . Fifty years ago, only 20 percent of all houses had more rooms than people living in them; by 1970, over 90 percent of our homes were spacious enough to allow more than one room per person. . . . Houses are not only bigger, they are also more luxuriously equipped.
>
> (Schor, 1991, p. 110)

Schor's compelling statistics continue by describing the changes in bathrooms and kitchens, the increased number of cars, changes in clothing standards, and so on.

Barbara Bergmann (1986) shows that husbands' work today yields four times the income, adjusted for inflation, as it did at the turn of the last century — when wives did not "need" to work. The difference is in consumption:

> After [a four-decade] shopping spree, the American standard of living embodies a level of material comfort unprecedented in human history. The American home is more spacious and luxurious than the dwellings of any other nation. Food is cheap and abundant. . . . On a per-person basis, yearly income is nearly $22,000 a year — or sixty-five times the average income of half the world's population.
>
> (Schor, 1991, p. 3)

Unfortunately, while consumerism is addictive, it does not bring happiness. Once people can afford the basics such as adequate housing and food, the trappings of life in the 90s do not add to people's sense of well-being. The pitfalls of consumerism include "a vicious pattern of wanting and spending which failed to deliver on its promises" (p. 122). People feel driven to keep up with the consumption of their neighbors and friends, even though they may not experience this as competition. Seeing a friend acquire something new plants the seed of possibility within ourselves. Television programs as well as commercials influence our desires: "I wonder how I would look in a pair of pants like that?" "I didn't know you could buy Thai peanut sauce in a bottle — maybe I'll get some."

Status comparisons center around commodities, things that can be seen. Schor points out that so long as our desires center around commodities, we will opt for increased income rather than increased leisure time. She argues that Americans have gotten caught up on an unsatisfying consumer treadmill.

The compulsion to work and spend leads to another basic cultural value that shapes family life and child care: mothers' "need" to work. (Fathers will be considered in the next section.)

Mothers' Need to Work

Do mothers today need to work? Certainly some must. Others choose to do so. We do not have social consensus about whether mothers of young children who are married to someone earning a decent income *should* work. Many older people in our society feel strongly that mothers should stay at home with their children, as do some religious groups and others. Many younger people and some older ones feel equally strongly that it makes more economic sense for most young mothers to work. Some feel that women have as much right to work as men, and the question should be redirected to include fathers: Do fathers *and* mothers need to work so much? Some feel that, ideally, mothers should be able to work but, unless they can find really good early care and education, by default they are the ones who should stay home if it is in the best interest of the child.

But according to the media and the current opinion of at least younger people in our society — including parents of young children — most mothers today work because they need to. What is meant by the term "need"? Taking a careful look, we see the term is vague and used loosely.

Mothers Who Must Work. Some mothers must work for basic survival: single women who cannot or will not live on welfare and married women whose husbands are unemployed or earn low incomes; also those with large families and those who live in urban areas where basic needs like housing are extremely costly. In the previous chapter, we saw that 13% of the total population and more than one-third of African-Americans sometimes do not have enough money for food. They *need* to work, as do those earning somewhat more.

The Relativity of Need. Families earning up to the median income or a little above it need to work to be able to participate in the going lifestyle. But as both Bergmann and Schor have shown, many mothers and fathers *could* work less if they consumed less and otherwise reduced their standard of living. Such "need" is not absolute. We *need* food and shelter, other "needs" are not dire necessities: "Our family needs a second car;" "I can't cook tonight, we need to pick up dinner;" "I need a portable Macintosh."

In conclusion, some mothers must work for survival. Others choose to work, in order to raise their families' standard of living, to pursue meaningful work, to prevent the set-back anticipated from taking a leave of absence from one's career, and to "get out of the house."

Where *Are* the Fathers?

Do fathers need to work? To the extent that this question evokes different affect as well as different answers from the question of whether mothers need to work, those differences reflect the degree of sexism remaining in our culture and our families today.

For all the changes that have come to American families, one cultural tradition has remained strong: a solid majority of fathers do not take responsibility for the care of children. Fathers are expected to work to support their families. Mothers may work too. But it is the mother who is considered responsible for housework and child care, regardless of whether she works or not.

Arlie Hochschild, in *The Second Shift* (1989), documents the cultural assumptions about male and female roles in the modern middle-class American family. Even women who work full time continue to perform or purchase all the traditional services of wives and mothers, spending enough time to qualify the "women's work" as a second job. A husband's job is usually considered more important than a wife's job, so he restores himself at home as she bustles about on her second shift. Usually this is justified by the fact that he earns more money, but when the wife's income is higher, it is justified by his need to have his male ego bolstered at home.

There is fairly compelling evidence, however, that this is beginning to change, especially among young, white, middle-class couples (Schor, 1991). While there have always been a few fathers who were deeply involved in the daily lives of their children, the numbers are increasing. These men are going against the cultural norms of their employers, friends, and neighbors. But in many families where attempts are being made to redistribute the household labor, change has come to the rhetoric more than the reality.

What about fathers and child care? In many families, they are not in the picture. According to caregivers and parent referral counsellors, while fathers sometimes help with transportation, they are not usually involved in the search for care or the ongoing negotiations to make it work. Why not?

Because taking care of children is considered the mother's responsibility. She is supposed to pay for child care out of her already devalued paycheck. Why shouldn't child care costs today be considered a joint expense of two working parents?

Fathers probably feel they are acting out of self-interest in maintaining their lack of responsibility and ignorance of their children's lives. But do they understand what they are missing? Have the changes in modern society made traditional gender roles not only obsolete but dysfunctional? These questions are being debated today from bedrooms to board rooms and in tabloids as well as academic journals.

In any case, the functions of caring for children and making a home that supports healthy family life need to be preformed by *some*body. Regardless of who does the caretaking, its *worth* should be re-evaluated as critical to the well-being of families and society at large. Instead, the value of caretaking continues to decline.

The Cult of Motherhood

A close look at the origin of the cult of motherhood identifies another cultural value that shapes the context of families and child care today. Studies of the history of childhood and the family show that "motherhood" and "childhood" as we know them are not innate to the human species but are economic and cultural constructs (Aries, 1962; DeMause, 1974; Polakow, 1993).

Philosophical constructs of French culture beginning with Rousseau, and subsequently of Victorian Europe, introduced the sentimental ideal of the family to the United States. The ideal is still championed today in the rhetoric of family values — even enhanced as a god-given imperative. Although historical records are sparse, particularly concerning poor people, it seems that there was no European term for "family" as we know it today until the late Middle Ages. Polakow notes that the French *famille* from the Latin *familia* denoted functional household including servants and their families. Only after the Industrial Revolution when work was removed from the household did a separate concepts emerge for the extended family and the nuclear family as we conceive them today (Polakow, 1993). As people moved from farms to urban areas, women's roles shifted to a private sphere within the family. Mothers apparently became more emotionally involved with their offspring and less overtly punitive, harsh, and controlling — now the forms of control are more subtle and psychological (Polakow, 1993). Did mothers' gradually increasing leisure time after the Industrial Revolution free them up to turn more attention to their children?

The cult of motherhood and "smother love" arose from this transformation in family life. Mothers were gradually assigned primary responsibility for the health and well-being of their children; the child-centered woman represented the ideal from that time until recent years, when a majority of middle-class women with young children entered the workforce. The development of attachment theory further united the mother and child in "suffocating images of reciprocal development, in which bonding is recast as mother bondage" (Polakow, 1993, p. 36).

> While at all times some mothers, both privileged and poor, have wanted and loved their children, the construct of mother love as biological, instinctive, or innate has served to legitimate particular conceptions of womanhood and motherhood as subordinate. Such conceptions cast sweeping shadows over public and private landscapes in family texts are written.
>
> (p. 37-38)

Despite the cultural hegemony of this ideology, interactions among immigrant families show that in most other countries young children are attached to extended family members and/or female kith and kin. Will assimilation doom the next generation of these families to this cultural loss?

The Devaluation of Motherhood

The value of mothering and motherhood itself has decreased in the last two decades, as the cultural norm gradually shifts from supporting moms with kids at home to supporting mothers working and kids in child care. During the 50s, when the polls suggested that women were happy to be at home caring for children, mothering plus homemaking were considered ideal work for women. Today it is considered normal for women, even mothers of babies, to work. The message is that mothers have more important things to do than be with their children.

The Commodification of Parenting. Barbara Katz Rothman (1989) argues that one cause of this devaluation is the development of technology that can replace all the nurturant functions of parenthood. As soon as a mother contributes the egg and a father contributes the sperm, the rest can be done by scientists and paid caregivers. *Once a substitute for a thing is possible*, she argues, *the original is denigrated*. The importance of long division was devaluated by calculators. The mystique of flying was devalued by airplanes.

Similarly, mothering is devalued by our culture of families who hire caregivers for their children. When wet nurses took over nursing, this function was commercialized and a price tag was put on the service.

> In these cash exchanges, the "breast-feeding relationship" was considered unimportant. Milk became a product to be bought and sold, not the basis of an intimate relationship. Once one buys the milk, the producer of the milk is reduced in status — her relationship is not a mothering relationship, not a relationship to the child, but a relationship to her product, her milk. (p. 95)

Parents have a similarly commercialized relationship with child care providers, argues Rothman, when

> we hire baby-sitters, day-care workers, nannies, housekeepers, to "watch" our children. The tasks are the traditional tasks of mothering — feeding, tending, caring, the whole bundle of social and psychological and physical tasks involved in the care of young children. When performed by mothers, we call this mothering. When performed by fathers, we have sometimes called it fathering, sometimes parenting, sometimes helping the mother. When performed by hired hands, we called it unskilled.
>
> We devalue these nurturing tasks when we contract for them. When we do them ourselves because we want to do them, we see them as precious, as special, as treasured moments in life. That is the contradiction that allows us to value the children so highly, to value our special time with them, to speak lovingly of the child's trust, the joys of that small hand placed in ours — and hire someone to take that hand, at minimum wage. (p. 97)

Mothers today, who take for granted that they can hire out these functions, have come to devalue themselves as mothers. Mothering is not held is esteem by many of today's working women. While some mothers surely treasure the moments of those sticky little hands in theirs, others are bored by or even alienated from mothering.

American attitudes toward children contribute another piece to understanding our puzzling social values and behaviors.

The Devaluation of Children and the Child's Experience

We pay lip service to the importance of American children. The rhetoric belies the reality we practice. Following is some of the evidence that children are devalued in the United States.[2]

Pediatric psychiatrist Michael Rothenberg (1980) argues that, while Americans idealize and romanticize children, they also perpetuate a conspiracy against them. Rothenberg cites seven areas in which children are grossly mistreated to support his thesis:

> 1. Child abuse, especially in public institutions such as jails, detention homes, and institutions for the mentally retarded
> 2. Schools, where coercion and a sense of duty strangle curiosity of inquiry
> 3. The juvenile justice system and foster care system, both inhumane and ineffective
> 4. The legislative system which has no comprehensive national children's policy but instead has 106 miscellaneous programs, usually uncoordinated and often underfunded, dealing with such isolated concerns as non-flammable clothing and safe cribs
> 5. Children's television programming, where the negative effects concerning violence, nutrition, and other areas of a child's development have been clearly documented, but which continues unregulated and brings huge profits to the networks
> 6. An economic system where children are targets of multi-billion dollar industries
> 7. An inadequate and misguided health care system
>
> (pp. 10-24)

Our culture's high rates of child sexual abuse, child neglect, infant mortality, and low-birth-weight infants should be added to the list.

Has our culture changed in its attitude toward young children? Do people today value children less than they used to? Historically there has always been an ambivalent attitude toward children, which is integrally tied to their social and economic value and meaning in the family. Viviana Zelizer (1985), in *Pricing the priceless child: The changing social value of children*, notes that children are no longer economically useful to their parents, as they were until the late nineteenth century. At the same time, they have became increasingly significant emotionally.

> Between the 1870s and the 1930s, the value of American children was transformed. The twentieth-century economically useless but emotionally priceless child displaced the nineteenth-century useful child. . . . [Since 1870, the] sentimentalization of childhood intensified regardless of social class. The new sacred child occupied a special and separate world, regulated by affection and education, not work or profit.
>
> (p. 209)

But are we today reaching a new historical stage in the relationship between the economic and sentimental value of children? Is the sacred, economically useless child outdated in the 1980s? There certainly seems to be a growing public uneasiness and puzzlement about the social situation of children in their families and in the larger society.

Norton Grubb and Marvin Lazerson (1982), in *Broken Promises*, describe the changing attitudes toward children during the last three centuries.

> In colonial America, children were viewed as both public and parental responsibilities. . . . The relationship between parent and child was not predominantly an emotional and personal one . . . .
>
> With the advent of the "private" family in the nineteenth century, children came to be less public members of the community and more members of their own families. The decline of communal oversight meant that parental responsibilities were defined as the duties of individual parents to their own children, not to children in general. . .
>
> The weak public commitment Americans feel toward other people's children is, in the first instance, rooted in the nineteenth-century conception of the private family with responsibility for its own children only. A different set of attitudes has compounded these divisions: Americans are ambivalent toward all children . . . . Despite the long standing view of themselves as "child-centered," Americans have always been ambivalent about children. . . .
>
> Social and economic conditions can modify the ambivalence we feel toward children. In the 1950s, for example, growth stimulated highly positive views of children. . . . In contrast, the bleak economic conditions of the 1970s fostered more obviously hostile feelings. High unemployment rates, low growth rates, and economic malaise made it more difficult to be optimistic about the future, creating insecurity for adults and for children. . . .
>
> During the 1970s, bearing children ceased to be an automatic part of adulthood. The rise of voluntary childlessness . . . signaled a willingness to consider the burdens children impose and an acknowledgment that children may not be worth the necessary sacrifice. . . . In a period of rising costs and poor future prospects, our negative feelings toward children have become magnified.
>
> (pp. 79-89)

Elizabeth Douvan found similar changes among the cross-section of Americans she and her colleagues interviewed between 1957 and 1976:

> In 1957, the choice to marry and have children was supported by strong norms backed with moral force. The common view was that one "ought" to marry and parent, that choosing not to do so was a sign of a flaw. . . . [In 1976] the role of spouse or parent was now judged by whether or not it could provide pleasure, satisfaction, and fulfillment to the individual.
>
> (1985, p. 599)

A survey of 1,230 families with children under age 13 found that parents were less self-sacrificing than parents of the generation before. Forty-three percent of them were what the researchers called *a "new breed" of parents, less oriented toward their children and more toward their own personal fulfillment* (Yankelovich, Skelly and White, Inc., 1977).

The quality of childhood in the United States is jeopardized by the need to squeeze children's experience to fit into their parents' lifestyle. They are rushed and pushed into daily routines that have lost the spontaneity of childhood (Elkind, 1988; Schor, 1991).

Our culture devalues youngest children most. Just as kindergarten is at the bottom of the public school hierarchy, early childhood departments suffer from the lowest funding and status at education colleges — when they exist at all. Pediatricians are low in doctors' pecking order.

One of the consequences of devaluing children's experience is parents' willingness to "park" young children in child care situations that fail to develop their potential or actually cause them harm. (Of course many older children are parked in schools that are similarly wasteful of or harmful to their experience.)

Privacy and Individualism. As described in the last section, the nearly total responsibility of parents for their own young children reflects a larger cultural value of respect for individualism and the sanctity of the private family. Both of these values are gained through the devaluation of the broader community. It is this cultural characteristic that allows our nation, in spite of its high standard of living, to provide so few children's programs.

The Commodification of Nurturance and Massification of Care

The devaluation of the daily experience of young children is another natural consequence of consumerism. While children themselves may be seen by their parents as worth more than any commodity, children's experience, which cannot be seen, is devalued. When their nurturance is hired out, it comes under the influence of the marketplace. Child care becomes a commodity that is bought and sold as "slots." Market forces act in invisible ways that are often contrary to the best interests of children, parents, and caregivers.

The Poor Quality of Child Care

As child care centers and some homes move into high-tech caregiving, they institute practices that are by definition contrary to good care and education. Here are but a few examples:

- Economies of scale have driven up the average size of centers, so that some now enroll more than 200 children. The amount of bureaucracy required to maintain order results in an institutional atmosphere that is contrary to the homey, informal, spontaneous atmosphere needed by young children.
- The large number of children per caregiver, necessary to keep costs down, by definition prevent the relaxed one-to-one interactions that develop language,

self-esteem, trust, empathy, and other skills for which the early years seem to be a critical period.

- By definition, developmentally appropriate programs plan activities in response to the interests and needs of each individual child. Kindercare and most of the other for-profit franchises distribute their curriculum from national headquarters. On any given day, every child of a given age in U.S. Kindercares supposedly experiences the same planned activities (for example: "Show the baby the ball. Say 'ball,' 'ball.'")

In *The Erosion of Childhood* (1982/1992), Valerie Polakow (Suransky) analyzes the quality of children's daily lives in child care centers. In a value system dominated by technology and economics, the quality of children's lives do not matter very much. Polakow's description of the boring, rigidly controlled, sometimes humiliating experiences of children in child care resonate with some of my observations. She notes that "the social alienation that results from the technologization of the human consciousness" has shaped our ideas, beliefs, and perceptions of reality about children and their place in our world. We tend to view children as commodities "to be dispensed with and deposited in impersonal or inadequate childcare institutions" or otherwise "relegated to an existence which does not impose upon the productivity of adults." (pp. 188-189) Infant care, especially in centers, seems to be especially low in quality (Whitebook et al., 1989; R. Clifford, personal communication, August, 1992).

Although we do not have very solid research evidence, I believe the quality of care in this country, overall, is quite poor. In visiting approximately 100 child care centers and 100 family child care homes over the last 10 years, in several states, I am appalled that our children are spending such a large portion of their early years in these situations. I have seen a whole group of bright-eyed young 4-year-olds entering a punitive "remedial" program become dull-eyed in one year. (This program, funded to help "at risk" children become "ready to learn" had precisely the opposite effect, as is so often the case [Meisels & Shonkoff, 1990].) I have seen babies who have learned not to expect attention. I've heard children yelled at and humiliated in ways that left me devastated too. I've seen masses of children herded around literally as if they were animals, and countless children wandering around homes and centers with *nothing* to do.

I've also seen thrillingly excellent early care and education — loving, warm, creative, simulating, and fun. But these homes and centers are few in number, they usually have no openings, and many families cannot afford them. Unfortunately, by focusing on concerns, this study perpetuates their lack of recognition.

Massification

"Keeping children," "watching children," "babysitting" — each of these terms connotes an attitude contrary to quality care that originates with parents. Children become products, like cars to be parked and animals to be kenneled. When one caregiver is responsible for a large group of young children, though it keeps costs low, she cannot achieve more than custodial care, keeping them safe, fed, toileted/diapered.

Paulo Friere (1973) uses the term "massification" to describe one aspect of the effect of technology on human experience, treating a group of individuals as a mass. The massification of child care is happening in this country today, as the large for-profit chains learn how to market their services effectively, including:

- location on a commuter highway, in-bound side
- fancy architecture, everything looking new and clean
- hot lunches
- inappropriate academic curriculum

These highly visible centers set the marketing tone, pressuring centers and homes with more child-centered values to take money away from budget items that don't "show." For example, a prospective parent touring a center cannot see if teachers turn over every couple of months or don't receive health benefits.

As early care and education become institutionalized, little children stop being seen as individuals in the eyes of their caregivers. They become a mass to be herded around, moved not only through planned activities but also through such daily routines as eating, sleeping, and eliminating. Rows of cribs are functionally similar to rows of kennels. Huge child care centers or family child care homes with ten or more children to one caregiver (especially common where such practice is legal) have much in common with kennels or egg farms. Ironically, as caregivers' duties come to resemble those of animal caretakers or parking lot attendants, their similarly low wages and status become justified.

Massification is alienating to adults who must wait in line for a meal or a bathroom. Such alienation is downright destructive when it occurs during the formative years of early childhood.

Child Care, a Profession

One aspect of the definition of a profession is that its practitioners possess a body of information that is not shared by the general public. In the last few decades, early childhood educators and child development researchers have exponentially expanded their understanding of the development of babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. They have made major gains in defining the characteristics of high-quality care and education (Bredekamp, 1987a, 1987b).[3] This satisfies one of the criteria of a profession: we have virtual consensus within the field about the knowledge and skills required, which have been informed by research and refined through constructive practice.

The field of child care is in the process of professionalizing, although at this time there is a wide gap between theory and practice because most caregivers are not required to have any specialized education. Other standard characteristics of professions which are not found in this occupation include public respect, good remuneration, and a life-long career. At this time, standards for certification and regulation are generally weak or lacking altogether.

Unfortunately, the profession's ideas about how children learn and what kinds of experiences are most important at different ages often contradict the popular culture's ideas, so they are sometimes opposed by parents. For example, early childhood educators recognize that young children learn best through play, but many parents of preschoolers want their children to be educated and they view play as a waste of time. Another example is that parents often fail to recognize the learning that occurs every day with infants and toddlers and therefore they do not care about the caregiver's knowledge level.[4]

Parents lack of understanding of the essence of care and nurturance hinders their ability to be informed consumers in the marketplace. Fancy environments look pretty but they don't make a baby feel loved. The kinds of interactions with caregivers that give young children what they need require that the caregiver be committed to nurturing them and that she not be responsible for too many children. This costs money which parents may not be able to or want to pay.

High-quality teacher education programs help caregivers understand young children, support their needs, and promote their development and learning. This in turn builds caregiver job satisfaction, which then builds commitment and longevity on the job. Until parents as consumers demand trained caregivers, there will be little funding to pay the higher salaries that are needed to motivate caregivers to get training and justify their expenditures for it.

The usual distancing that separates professionals from the lay public is particularly threatening to this field, where a close partnership between parents and caregivers is an essential element of quality care. We will return to this topic in Chapter 8.

Making the Best of a Bad Situation

For too long, child care professionals have suppressed information about the low quality of care — or tried not to notice it themselves — not wanting to give child care a worse reputation than it already has, not wanting to raise parents' anxiety when no apparent solutions are available. Just as parents try to put the best face on their child care situation because they feel they have no choice, so child care workers usually try to avoid naming the problems. They believe they are making the best of a bad situation. In fact they are perpetuating and reproducing it as well.

The next two chapters discuss ramifications of these concerns.

Notes to Chapter 6

[1] Sarason's enlightening approach defined the behavioral regularities of public schools to search for the underlying cultural assumptions. Two examples of his observations are:

- the rate at which teachers ask questions compared to the rate at which children ask questions; and
- that students are supposed to learn something about math every school day from first grade through twelfth grade.

He asks how our culture justifies such practices. What alternative practices were consciously or unconsciously excluded so that these habits could become regularized?

[2] This section was originally published in Modigliani, 1986.

[3] At present, this information is described by the term "developmentally appropriate practice."

[4] In one of the first studies to address this dichotomy, the Jacksons captured one aspect of these two perspectives, distinguishing between those who see childminding (the unfortunate British term for child care) as "essentially a passive activity [and those who see it as] an active role, as 'work.'" (1979, p.165)

CHAPTER 7

SOCIAL INVESTMENT AND FAMILY SPENDING

Our society is in transition, now purchasing increasing numbers of services that used to be provided by women at home for free. But the commercial alternatives are not always satisfactory. While ready-made clothing may be a fine alternative, fast food does not provide good nutrition. Commodified, underfunded child care is not a satisfactory way to raise young children. *Because traditional women's work is still devalued, we have not appreciated the investment required to replace it with services of equivalent or sufficient quality.*

It is a peculiarity of this country that, despite our great national wealth, we spend so little on child care. We can no longer depend upon a child care system supported by workers who half-volunteer their labor. We must recognize the true value of child care and its importance as an investment.

Child Care as an Investment

Consumers of early care and education — both parents and government — tend to think of child care as someone to watch the child, a service to be consumed and used up.[1] But good child care is also an investment in the future of that child, the family, and the nation.

What is an investment? In mainstream economic theory, investment involves *sacrifice of present consumption for future benefit* — allocating money (thereby forgoing the consumption of goods or services) and/or allocating time and effort, "sweat equity." Investments build *capital* — either money or "human capital" (the kind that employers pay more for) which makes a person worth more in some way. The *return* on an investment depends on its eventual benefits compared to its costs. (Samuelson, 1989)

The classic example of human capital investment is a parent's investment in a child. Fuchs (1990) cites the case of a parent giving up an afternoon of leisure to take his or her child to a museum. On the one hand, the parent is investing in the human capital of the child, contributing to the child's future appreciation of natural or human creations, and so on. But the experience may also be intrinsically valuable to the parent, requiring no sacrifice.

To invest more in child care, parents or governments must revise their spending priorities. The question is whether the return on this investment would be worth the sacrifice. How important is good child care?

The Value of the Child Care Experience

Children do not just vegetate in child care. Because most adults devalue children and their daily experience, they underrate the influence — good or bad — of what happens during a young child's day.

In fact, a child's potential to develop is dampened by being left in the same boring porta-crib for hours every day, or wandering around a room with the same minimal play opportunities. In massified centers and homes, children have little chance to practice their rapidly developing language because no one is listening to or talking to them, beyond brief commands. The potential to develop is undermined by the daily thwarting of ego and will, or worse, as occurs in bad child care.

Until recently, we believed that "there was practically nothing going on in the heads of [babies]" (Maugh, 1992, p. D1) noted a psychologist in commenting on the compelling new findings about a 5-month old's concept of number.[2] Most people do not notice the amount of time a baby looks at something — the measure used to determine what is familiar or unexpected to a baby. It is hard for most adults to comprehend the complex set of skills that must be mastered before a preschooler can, for example, count a group of objects — counting comes so naturally to us. Young children struggle with a range of skills we take for granted, in relating to others, in using one's body, in innumerable ways.

Many parents do not value the specialized knowledge of early childhood professionals. Because parents usually want caregivers to be extensions of themselves, they sometimes actively reject caregivers with advanced degrees in early care and development. And indeed, some child care programs that purport to be "educational" are not appropriate for young children.

Is it because very young children's experience is most far removed from our own that we least value and understand it? The quality of infant and toddler care, at least in centers, is lower than for preschoolers in part because caregivers do not understand what such young children need.

Considering the importance of a child's early experience, it cannot be wise for government and parents to choose poor-quality child care. (It is not relevant to this argument that children might be just as understimulated or abused at home as they are in child care. People who are in the business of early care and education can and should offer children more than they might get at home, just as Head Start and the public schools should with older children.)

As experts learn more about the critical importance of the quality of young children's daily experience, and as this information slowly trickles through the culture, we will increasingly appreciate that child care is one of the most important investments that a family and a society can make.

The Full Cost of Care

The Demand and Supply Study (Willer et al., 1991), found that child care centers, on average across all programs that charge fees, charged $1.59/hour in 1990, while regulated family child care homes charged $1.64/hour and non-regulated homes charged $1.48/hour. On average, families spent about 10% of their income on child care, but the percentage of family income paid differed greatly depending on income level. *Unsubsidized families earning under $15,000 per year spent 23% of their income on child care, whereas families with incomes over $50,000 spent only 6%*.

The Children's Defense Fund calculated that a single parent in Boulder, Colorado working full time at the minimum wage would have to pay 52.6% of her income for care of a 4-year old, and 77.7% of her income for infant care, to pay the average fees of $4,472 and $6,604 respectively. Two Boulder parents working full time at the minimum wage would have to pay 26.3% of their income for a 4-year old and 38.8% for and infant. (Children's Defense Fund, 1991, 1992)

Thus it is a mistake to talk about the affordability of child care as a fixed concept. *It is highly affordable for upper-income families and highly unaffordable for low-income families.*

While it is difficult for many families to pay the current market rate for child care, in fact market rate is not adequate to support decent quality of care. We saw in Chapters 4 and 5 that child care workers substantially subsidize the cost of child care through their low and inequitable wages and fringe benefits. *If the full cost of child care were to be paid* — with equitable compensation and good group sizes, staff ratios, and caregiver education levels — it would *double, triple, or even quadruple* current market rates (Fuchs & Coleman, 1991; Willer, 1990).

While it may be unduly optimistic that the full cost of care, no longer subsidized by workers' inequitable wages, be reached by the year 2000, as is the goal of the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Full Cost Campaign, national interest in child care is growing. Wages are showing signs of responding, especially in states with relatively strong economies, although the current recession and unemployment level have generally dampened them. We will probably enter the next century with greater awareness of the problems and some progress toward solutions.

In *The Hidden Costs of Not Paying the Full Cost of Care,* Ellen Galinsky (1990b) has attempted to summarize the critical ingredients of quality and their effects on children, parents, and caregivers, and from that to describe what is sacrificed in poor-quality care. Low self-esteem, discouragement about learning, lack of self-discipline, lack of faith in others, poor health and unsafe environments negatively affect children. Galinsky quotes Carollee Howes' summary of several studies: "Children who entered low quality child care as infants were [the] least task oriented and considerate of others as kindergartners, had the most difficulty with peers as preschoolers, and were distractible, extroverted, and hostile as kindergartners." (1990b, p. 32) Children pay the price for poor child care and some will unconsciously continue to do so for a lifetime.

In turn, there are other unmeasured costs of poor child care, including lost productivity of parents at work, and lost potential for the family, future employers, and communities at large (Families and Work Institute, in press). If we were aware of the dollar price of all this loss, our personal and public spending priorities would certainly change.

But Where Will the Money Come From?

The current political climate and power structure do not favor child care as an entitlement for all our children. Until that changes, additional funding for child care would best be achieved through a three-tiered approach:

- *upper-income parents* paying the full cost of care,
- *government* paying more when families can't afford the full cost of good care, and
- *employers* paying more for their increased share of parents' labor.

What proportion of the true cost should be paid by each group? In response to our current political climate and cultural values, which emphasize parents' responsibility for their own children and each family for itself, we might best begin by asking how much families can afford to pay. It is in the best interests of upper-income parents to pay more for and demand more from their child care. The government/corporate share would then be the remainder or reciprocal of what parents can afford. To rectify the 2-class system where poor children get second-rate care, government would be wise to contribute more to this critical national investment.

When child care fees increase for middle- and upper-income parents (which I predict they will when the economy recovers and market forces will be driven to respond to the labor shortage of caregivers) *these* influential parents may become the political impetus for the development of child care entitlement for all our nation's children.

How Much Can Families Afford to Pay for Child Care?

Can parents afford to pay more for child care? Certainly the rich can. And certainly the poor cannot. The question becomes: How much can parents of different income levels afford? To answer this question, we will first consider national family income statistics, then look at current family spending priorities.

Family Income

In 1990, the year of the most recent published data, family income decreased for the first time since 1982. The following pre-tax income statistics exclude the value of public subsidies, employee fringe benefits, and capital gains:

	1989	1990
Median family income	$36,062	$35,353
Median household income	30,468	29,943
First real annual decline since 1982		
(Decline concentrated in Northeastern		
and Western metropolitan areas)		
Women year-round full-time	19,793	19,816
(71% of men's, + 4.4% in one year,		
18.3% in decade)		
Men year-round full-time	28,917	27,866
Per person income	14,815	14,387
First real annual decline since 1982		
(Includes children, non-working adults)		

(U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991, p. 3)

Real income in 1990 declined most for men in Northeastern and Western metropolitan areas. Income for women, Black workers, and Asian/Pacific Island workers has remained virtually unchanged, thereby reducing the pay inequity of these groups a bit.

Real wages for nonsupervisory workers decreased by 19% over the last two decades (Kilborn, 1992). Employer-paid health insurance decreased between 1977 and 1987; children covered by their parents' employer-sponsored health insurance decreased from 73% to 63% during that decade, with only 47% of children of working-poor parents covered. Only 40% of Black and Latino children were covered by health insurance in 1990 (Children's Defense Fund, 1991). Because men's income tends to increase with years of work experience, young fathers earn less than older men in this country. (Women's income does not rise much with experience, so young mothers earn about the same as all workers.) Thus, the average income of two-parent families with children in child care is lower than the average income of all two-parent.[3]

The Effects of the Recent Economic Downturn and Income Redistribution

Decline in Family Income. Family income took a clear downturn in the summer of 1990 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991) and preliminary findings show that it continued to fall significantly in 1991 (Kilborn, 1992). Between 1973 and 1990, the economy was somewhat troubled, although the statistics of various economists do not paint a consistent picture. Real income per hour slipped slightly downward (Levy, 1988; Schor, 1991). As high-paying, union-supported jobs in the manufacturing sector were replaced by low-paying jobs in the service sector, people have had to work longer hours to stay even.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, family income either remained unchanged or increased 6% during those years, depending on which of two methods is used — the BLS changed the way it assessed housing to adjust for cost-of-living changes (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991). Another study concluded that real income for families with children actually declined from $32,206 in 1973 to $29,527 in 1984 (Rich, 1986). Housing has become considerably less affordable during this period: in 1973, on average a 30-year-old man could pay for a median-priced home with 21% of his income. By 1984 this required 44% of the income of a 30-year old man (Levy, 1988).

Average figures are misleading because so few people are near average. The slight gains in average income of all workers is a reflection of the major gains of the top earners; in lower-income families the average income is falling (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991).

The Rich Are Getting Richer and the Poor Getting Desperate. During the 1980s, income became far less equitably distributed. Federal and state tax policies increased the wealth of the rich during the Reagan-Bush years, while cuts were made in aid to the poor and unemployed (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1992). Upper-income consumption met high times in the 80s. As the poor got poorer, the well-off went on a buying frenzy (Schor, 1991).

Poor and working class people in this country lost political power during the Reagan-Bush years, as unions shrink in size and influence and as the Democratic Party has turned its attention from the working class to the dissatisfied middle class. Government programs to support the lowest-income families were cut during these years, as the numbers of single-parent families increased.

Lower-income people, especially those in the bottom quarter of the population, have experienced substantial declines in their standard of living since 1973 (Wilson, 1987). The feminization of poverty, discussed in Chapter 5, has produced an increase in the number of young children in poverty. Today, families in the lowest 25% have trouble meeting even basic expenses — 13% of those surveyed by a Gallup Poll in 1989 reported that they did not have enough money to buy food at some time during the previous year; the number was over one-third for African-Americans (Schor, 1991). The feminization of poverty has hurt single mothers and their children most, and especially black single mothers (Litan, 1988). Lower-income Americans witness the American dream from the sidelines — watching TV, browsing at the mall. With poverty comes increased stress from unemployment, child maltreatment, and other family conflict (Garbarino, 1990).

The poor getting poorer hurts children the most, because the newly poor in post-industrialist America are single mothers and their children. In 1990, fully 40% of children in families where the head of household was under age 30 lived in poverty, up from 20% in 1973 (Children's Defense Fund, 1992). Polokow describes how our public policies blame the poor, casting them in

> a self-created condition of deficiency [rather than as victims of an] unjust social and economic policy. . . . Poverty is no child's entitlement; and no child should be disenfranchised and disempowered by this injustice.
>
> (1992, p. 38)

The Effect of Increased Parent Work Hours. The loss in earning power has been masked only because women have significantly increased their number of work hours to maintain their family's financial standard of living (Danzinger and Gottschalk, 1986; Levy, 1988; Schor, 1991).

> Clearly, if only the father worked in an average young two-parent family in the 1980s, there would be a drastic decline in family income as compared to 1973. . . .
>
> Placing both parents in the work force has significantly improved the gross income of many families, but the effect on the net income is more modest. There are often additional costs associated with two-earner families. Expenditures for child care, additional clothing,

transportation, and for services formerly performed in the home may significantly offset a portion of the increased income.

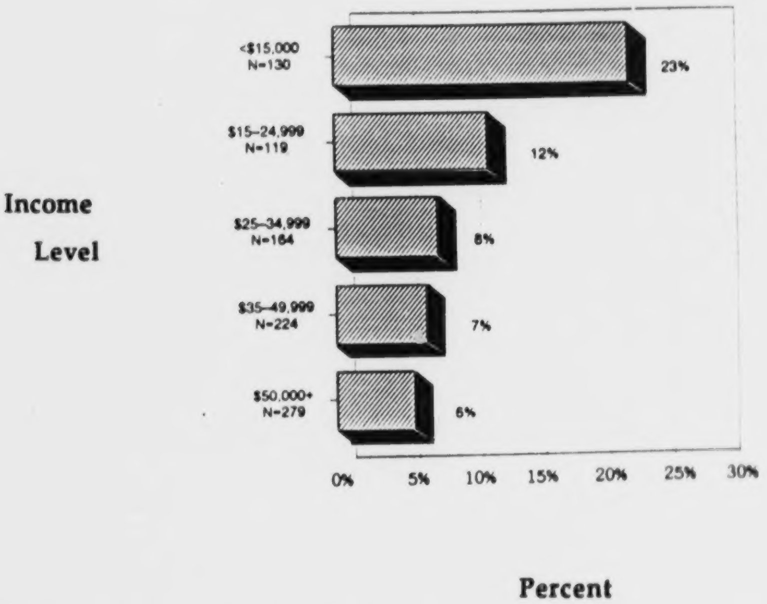
(Joint Economic Committee, 1986)

The factor shared by most of today's young families across all social classes is stress. Foremost in contributing to the stress is the time crunch felt by mothers who must constantly hustle to perform both their paid jobs and the second shift of housework and that they accept as their female duty (Hochschild, 1989; Schor, 1991).

Current Child Care Fees

How much do parents actually pay for fees? The following chart tells the story for employed mothers (*sic*) who use paid child care. The percentages reflect the income spent for the care of the mother's youngest child under age five:[4]

Figure 1. Mean Percentage of Family Income Spent on Child Care



Source: National Child Care Survey 1990 (Reprinted from Willer et al., 1991, p. 32)

It should be noted that this is the cost for one child — many parents have more than one child in care. (Unfortunately, The Census Bureau perpetuates the notion that it is the mother who pays for child care — why don't they keep the data for employed parents, or all families?)

The cost of center-based care is usually more expensive than family child care. In the survey of resource and referral agencies cited in Chapter 1, the average cost of full-time care of a 4-year-old ranged from a low of $3,120 in Orlando, Florida to a high of $7,176 in Boston. (Children's Defense Fund, 1991, 1992)

It is shocking that parents earning under $15,000, usually single mothers, must pay *one-quarter* or more of their pre-tax earnings on child care. That leaves them less than $12,000 for everything else. And in contrast, it is also shocking that families earning over $50,000 pay *only*

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one-seventeenth of their earnings for care. Considering the amount of discretionary money available to each of these groups, the percentages would better be reversed.

Data from the same study show that upper-income families do not pay much more for child care than lower-income families do (Hofferth, Brayfield, Deitch, & Holcomb, 1991) — strange, considering how much more they spend on their housing, cars, food, clothing, and almost everything else. The Harris Poll discussed in Chapter 5 also suggests that the wealthy pay approximately the same amount for child care as do lower-income families.

Child care is expensive, despite its underfunding. Because it is so labor-intensive, the compensation of each caregiver must be supported by only a few parents or government subsidies. Young families have to pay for this service during the years when they are at the lower end of their earning power. Ironically, when families later incur college expenses, significantly more government assistance is available.

As I have heard frequently, the mothers "over a barrel" in Zinsser's study (1987) agree with the Census Bureau and their husbands that the cost of child care should be measured against their own earnings.

> Although mothers were sympathetic to the plight of day care workers earning low wages, they did not feel they could pay more. . . . "I'm only making $15,000. She deserves what I'm making, but I don't have it. I've got to pay her so I can continue to work, but I can never pay her enough. You got all these other bills, you know." (pp. 37-37)

As we saw in Chapter 4, child care providers and directors take parent affordability into consideration when they set fees.

In the parent focus groups on choosing child care, quality was sometimes but not always correlated with cost. Parents received significantly different quality of care even though they paid approximately the going rate.

> Many mothers felt that they wanted to make sure that they gave their children the best they could, but found the cost of child care prohibitive. When the participants discussed how much they paid for child care, *the conversation gravitated toward how to pay less*. The person with the lowest child care payments was frequently asked for the name of their provider.
>
> Middle-income women said they could afford to pay an extra $10 to $20 dollars a week if it would translate into much better care. But they also resented how much child care costs. Low-income women could not afford to spend any more on child care. *Many were spending as much as the middle-income women in their areas.*
>
> (EDK Associates, 1992, p. 5, italics mine.)

Consumers tend to pay for fancy environments that "show" rather than invisible salaries that attract and retain high quality caregivers. The for-profit centers that base their budgets on parents' preferences spend their money differently from child-centered programs (Culkin, Helburn, & Morris, 1988; Roupp, Travers, Glantz, & Coelen, 1979a; Whitebook et al., 1989).

Workers Subsidizing Upper-Income Parents? As we saw in Chapter 4, child care workers subsidize parents (and government and employers) through their inequitably low wages. While many caregivers would choose to subside low-income parents, *how many would choose to subsidize those earning over $50,000 per year?* In the Demand and Supply study, there were 279 families in this category compared to only 130 families with incomes under $15,000. (This sample may be biased toward upper-income families, although many lower-income families would be omitted from the study because they use unpaid relative care.)[5] It is my impression, from asking the question at a number of child care conferences, that most caregivers significantly underestimate average family income.

Where *Do* Our Family Dollars Go?

This question is asked frequently, as the decreasing value of work in America collides with the increasing pressure to consume. Just as child care has its trilemma of quality, compensation, and affordability (Willer, 1990), so do *families make trade-offs in an economic trilemma of time spent working vs. dollars available for consumption plus investment vs. the quality of personal and family life.*

Advertising bombards us with enticements to consume. The media promote the glories of upper-class living. Newspaper articles as well as ads document the new fads — Nintendo computer games one year, microwave ovens the next, $100 running shoes, upward and onward:

> America's penchant for one-ups-manship and grandeur helps explain why the word for today's fastest growing trend in ice cream is — if you haven't noticed — super-premium. High butterfat, high-grade ingredients and high prices. . . . Nothing is ordinary, everything has to be extraordinary. . . . Aside from super-premium and premium scoops, pints and half gallons, the frozen novelty category — which includes fruit and juice bars and pops such as DoveBars — is burgeoning as well. . . . Whether the supermarket freezer case can accommodate all of these products is another story. The land of opportunity is only so big. There's even a super-premium kitty litter.
>
> (Sugarman, 1986, pp. E1, E8)

In a typical American supermarket the display of products is quite fantastic. Just think of the endless array of brands and flavors of food for dogs and cats. Or think of the dazzling range of furniture and equipment invented for babies during the last two decades. In the last chapter we saw that desire for commodities suck parents into working and spending.

In their hearts, some parents probably understand that they are being victimized, but they do not know how to extract themselves from the work-and-spend trap. One of Zinnser's interviewees, reflecting on her lifestyle choices and her perceived lack of choice, said poignantly:

> [Y]ou just kind of give up. You look at it, and you see all these options going by and your child getting older. I know I'm doing things wrong, and I'll pay for it later and my child will pay for it later. But there is nothing I can do . . . You have just spent your entire day running around with your heart in your mouth trying to get everyplace on time. And you know you should be doing something else, and you can't. And you just see things going by. And at a certain point you realize, "Well, I just lost my chance to do things the way I felt they should be done. It's just like, "That's it."
>
> (1987, p. 39)

There is an element of resignation along with despair in this lament. If such feelings are common in mothers, as I believe they are, it is difficult to understand why parents aren't rising up to demand better, more affordable child care, as well as parental leave and part-time jobs.

From rich to poor, Americans these days (at least until 2 years ago) are consuming more than ever, as we have seen. For poor people, this may simply mean getting a telephone for the first time, or being able to afford to buy meat on a regular basis. Our lower-income citizens are still standing on the margins, watching others pump up Nikes, eat DoveBars. Often they are highly frustrated at the dream deferred, so near and yet so far.

Family Spending Priorities. Walk through the malls, see the junk. See the same junk piled around the garbage cans at trash collection time. Paying for such commodities traps parents into the work-and-spend cycle that does not gratify them. Stress-reducing, time-saving leisure services such as faster food also compete for family dollars. Wouldn't some families be happier if they got off the treadmill? If they traded in some work-hours and some income for time to have sit-down dinners together? Perhaps even to cook together? What are families are made of? What happens to families when most of their traditional activities are purchased as services?[6]

Time is the commodity in shortest supply for families today. Interesting, in light of the idea that time was not even commodified until the Industrial Revolution, when labor became money and consequently time became money (Schor, 1991).

What Families Should Pay for Child Care. There is no right answer to how much a family *should* pay for care. The answer depends upon one's values and assumptions about the relative value of child care and the marginal effects of spending more or less, compared to one's other consumption and investment options.

Juliet Schor concluded that families with incomes in the upper 40% are "well-off" (1991, p. 113). Her reasoning seems sound, and is confirmed by the state of Minnesota, which subsidizes child care fees for parents who earn up to 110% of median income, a similar level. Accordingly, I would argue that parents in the upper 40% can afford to and should pay the full cost of care. Government and corporate dollars should subsidize the remainder. The most cost-effective strategy for these sectors would use a sliding scale based on need.

Government Spending Priorities

Government is the other major source and potential of human capital investment funding for children — public schools and Medicaid are two examples. Voters, policy makers and other influential individuals determine the amount of public funding for, and the nature of, children's programs. Parallel to the question of whether families are spending the right amount on child care is the question of whether the public, at all levels of government, is spending the right amount of money on child care compared to the other commodities and services purchased or invested in. Nearly every industrialized country offers some form of universal child care and education, as well as parental leave to care for newborn babies. (Kamerman & Kahn, 1991; Kamerman, 1991).

The Two-Tiered Access to Quality. Our national child care situation is a dramatic case of separate, unequal education. Lower-income parents do not usually have access to good care unless they are poor enough to qualify for government subsidies (Whitebook et al., 1989). Good child care costs money that somebody has to pay — good child care simply cannot be done on the cheap. Except for the very low-income children who qualify for Project Head Start and other public programs, it is usually only upper-income children who can afford the kind of care that gives them a head start.

Unfortunately, the lack of public recognition of the value of the early years and good child care prevents us from recognizing the dramatic discrimination in child care. Whether through altruism or pragmatism, we cannot afford to let one quarter of our children grow up in such desperate, Third World conditions, while their rich counterparts consume with excess. Marian Wright Edelman calls us to look at today's poor children: "All over America, they are the small human tragedies who will determine the quality and safety and economic security of America's future as much as your and my children will." (1992, p. 84). The lives of our poor children make a mockery of our national ideals — nowhere in our society is the rhetoric of justice for all less a reality.

Just as U.S. families with decent incomes have cultivated numerous consumer tastes, government has its own consumer cravings. Despite the end of the Cold War, huge quantities of money are still being appropriated for weapons systems that even the Pentagon does not want. Huge quantities are being spent, redistributing money from all taxpayers to the rich, to bail out the shoddy practices of banks and further enrich the well-connected (Gerth, 1990). Huge quantities of money are being spent to pay the interest on the federal debt, much of it accumulated during the 1980s as our country got caught in a national cycle of borrow-and-spend. Television markets the desire for government spending — consider CNN's telecast of the recent Gulf War as advertising for the defense budget. Consider local news programs' nightly promotion of the criminal justice system. These spending habits leave little for child care.

If child care fees for upper-income parents begin to approach the full cost of care, it is likely that some of these influential parents will become interested in advocating child care as an governmental entitlement for children of all income levels, like public school.

Employer Spending Priorities

What about employer support for child care? Corporations are profiting from mothers' and fathers' increased work hours — the ones taken from family and leisure time. They are also profiting from caregivers' undervalued wages. (Recall Neugebauer's [1987] estimate that in one year, child care center teachers subsidized American businesses by $2.4 billion by caring for employees' children.) U.S. businesses make only a token contribution to their employees' child care needs (Families and Work Institute, in press). They should contribute their fair share.

I am not a strong advocate of employer-sponsored child care, because the motivations of corporations often conflict with the best interests of children, and even their worker-families. For example, I have noticed that the quality of care that employers have sponsored depends entirely upon the monetary value of the workers they are trying to recruit or retain. If McDonald's has trouble recruiting workers in a particular city, they might be well advised (by their accountant) to support a child care center or family child care network, to entice young mothers out of their homes. But predictably, these programs would offer low-quality "Kentucky-fried child care."

The clearest example I have seen of the negative influence of the profit motive on employer-sponsored child care was a case where the CEO started a wonderful center when she became pregnant. But rapid deterioration of quality set in after her child moved on to school.

In general, employers are likely to subcontract out their child care to for-profit child care businesses, so as to avoid having to pay the employer's standard health insurance, retirement, sick and vacation days. These employers would also be at risk for child care unionization and comparable worth campaigns. Employers have been the impetus behind sick child care, but they seldom support parents for staying home to care for sick children.

We cannot count on corporations' altruism. Ideally the national government would mandate that corporations contribute support through taxes to support government-sponsored programs and/or vouchers to assist their workers in paying for the care of their choice. While government is seldom altruistic, the countervailing forces are not as strong as in most corporations.

We can see in the statistics about quality of care in for-profit child care centers (Whitebook et al., 1989) that the profit motive often conflicts with what little children need. Recognizing that there are a few corporations who truly give priority to the best interests of their employees over their bottom line, we must not allow the corporate sector too much influence over this vulnerable field.

Clearly — if young children are to spend half of their waking hours in child care, and the quality of those early years will influence the quality of the remainder of their lives and those of the others around them — then the quality of child care of a society is an indicator of a nation's wellbeing.

Assuming the quality of care depends upon the quality of the caregiver, child care as an occupation should pay wages and benefits that attract a competent labor pool. When people who might otherwise enjoy working with young children see these jobs as "nothing but dead end and heartbreak" as one teacher called it in Chapter 4, those who have other options will choose "real jobs." Our government, our parents, and our employers together must invest enough in child care to insure that it is a viable occupation. But government, most parents, and most employers do not understand the value of this investment today.

Child care is an investment, not simply traditional women's work to be consumed. The first step to procuring sufficient funding will be to identify the full cost of care and decouple it from parent's ability to pay. Then participants and advocates must raise awareness in each sector to "raise the level of pain" high enough so that each recognizes that poor child care is their problem and join the campaign to gather sufficient resources to invest in good quality care for all our nations' children.

Notes to Chapter 7

[1] See Grubb (1991) for an analysis of the differing motivations behind existing child care policy approaches.

[2] This was very much the attitude of my generation of well-educated parents, just two decades ago. It wasn't until toddlers started talking that we noticed much in the way of their cognitive development.

[3] I'm in the process of getting income data from the Census Bureau for families with children under age 5.

[4] The latest Census statistics report that, on average, working parents spend 6.8% of their income on child care. Women living in poverty spend 21% of their income on child care ("A Realistic," 1992). The complete report is not yet available.

[5] The Economics of Family Child Care study, under way at Wheelock College, will analyze these factors.

[6] Another middle-class urban practice contrary to the spending standards of middle-class parents two decades ago is the purchase-of-service birthday party: roller-blades, circus, or pizza parlour. Little time needed for planning or cleaning up.

CHAPTER 8

MOTHERS AND CAREGIVERS
TWO WORLDS APART

We have seen that child care in this nation is in crisis. It shortchanges the children who spend long dreary hours of their formative years in child care that is less than adequate. Government at all levels contributes much less to support the quality of care or to help families pay for this very expensive, labor-intensive service than do governments in other developed nations. We have seen that although caregivers enjoy their work, they are leaving it *en masse* because of its low income and social status. The occupation is so troubled that many of its workers do not even consider it a "real job."

Why are we raising our children like this? Why haven't child care workers and parents joined together to change this appalling situation? Although some answers are already clear, they do not seem sufficient to explain the situation. At a fundamental level it is hard to understand why so little has been done to address these problems. This chapter explores the paradoxically separate and distant lifeworlds of caregivers and mothers and the implications of their estrangement for the nature of child care.

We begin with an exploration of the complex relationships between the two parties of adults in child care arrangements. The focus of this chapter is on mothers rather than parents because in reality they are the main players in child care.

Most fathers are remarkably oblivious to their children's child care. As we have seen earlier, they may drop their children or pick them up, they may determine "how much their wives can spend" on care, but basically they leave the child care to their wives — as women's work. Fathers usually do not get involved in the living, breathing, daily life of child care that is the concern of this chapter. Why? In Chapter 6, we saw that the realm of women and children at home are essentially devalued in our culture. Many men do not pay much attention to them.

The Distant Lifeworlds of Mothers and Caregivers

The first issue is that mothers and caregivers are worlds apart.[1] Their needs often conflict. Their perspectives are so different that they do not understand one another, although they are not aware of this problem. Their negative and conflicting feelings extract a toll from themselves, each other, and children. (Since parents were not part of the current study, this section draws most of its information about parents from other studies.)

In fact, mothers and caregivers are both caught up in untenable positions (Nelson, 1990). The best interest of the child demands that they have an effective working partnership (Modigliani, 1990b), yet their relationship is undermined by their conflicts. We have only begun to explore the interwoven layers of dependency, camaraderie, jealousy, value conflicts, power struggles, gratitude, and love that contribute to the complex relationships between caregivers and mothers. The potential for their political alliance as well as their personal partnerships is undermined by a cultural and economic system which pits them against each other.

Is This a Business Relationship or Are We Friends? Because family child care occurs in a home setting, observes Margaret Nelson in *Negotiated Care* (1990), both providers and mothers shift ambivalently between the norms of market exchange and the norms of social exchange.[2] No established guidelines support them in negotiating their emotionally charged relationships. Additional role confusion is introduced when parents and providers are also friends or relatives. Ambiguity of relationship norms affects most child care centers as well. Although somewhat more formal and business-like than child care homes, centers too involve women performing this most traditional of women's work, usually in fairly isolated settings.

The ambiguities of relationship norms are particularly troubling for mothers around issues of control. Nelson (1990) identifies struggles of power and control between mothers and providers: mothers want to control the arrangement but soon find that they have to negotiate. Providers seem to gain control because the work occurs in their homes, their domain.

Recall from Chapter 4 Judith Rollins' description of the emotionally complex relationships between domestic workers and their employers (1985). Rollins described the role confusions introduced because domestics perform the employers' work, and thus were perceived as surrogates for, or extensions of them. Similarly, the fact that providers and teachers are perceived as the mothers' surrogates complicates their relationships.

A certain degree of conflict is also contributed because both mothers and caregivers tend to favor their own interest and the child's interests over the other party's, as they should. A typical conflict is that a caregiver may believe that a young child needs an afternoon nap, while the parent feels that a nap causes the child to stay up too late in the evening. Mothers may want caregivers to spend more time with their children, giving them special treatment that caregivers feel is impractical while they are caring for many children.

Lack of Direct Communication. Adding to this confusion are the quite different needs and perspectives of each role. Yet, neither caregivers nor mothers are direct and assertive with each other. True to their socialization as females, they tip-toe around expressions of their own needs or interests. They avoid conflict. Often they each feel powerless in relation to the other (Nelson, 1990; Zinsser, 1987).

The Perspective of Mothers (and a Few Fathers)

Mothers often bring to their relationship with caregivers a shortage of time and an abundance of emotional distress.

Time Pressure

The first thing to understand about mothers in all these studies is that they are pressed for time. For many who work full time, it is as if their lives are built around a ticking stopwatch.

Every mother in Zinsser's study reported problems with time pressure. One described spending the "entire day running around with your heart in your mouth trying to get every place on time" (1987, p. 39). We have seen that caregivers have expectations for mothers that require time and emotional energy, such as that they be involved in the details of child care. Being pressed for time, mothers resent providers' emotional expectations. Nelson concluded, "Some women simply do not feel they have the time to be concerned about anyone else; they find the requirement of showing gratitude or friendship a heavy burden they do not want to assume." (1990, p. 66) While they may prefer to keep financial arrangements informal, they want their personal relationship to be tidy and business-like. As we saw in Chapters 3 and 4, caregivers probably want those personal relationships to be informal, while they are likely to want the financial arrangements to be business-like.

Dr. Berry Brazelton, in a chapter on the shortage of time in two-career families, notes that there is never enough time for emergencies or unexpected stress, as well as

> no time for joy and the extra pleasures of just being together or of being alone. 'No one ever smiles at our house' is a common complaint [of teenagers] now.

> Everyone is too busy. There is likely to be no leeway for humor, for fun for its own sake.
>
> (1985, p.181).

Brazelton advises parents to save time for their children's early years:

> The children's lives at home are limited, and it is on these early years that they base their self-image. Unless you have time and humor to listen to your child's side of each daily event, you too may be remembered as "never having smiled.'" (p. 183)

Arlie Hochschild's *The Second Shift* (1989) documents the long hours mothers still spend on the traditional homemaker's duties, now on top of full-time jobs outside the home. Full-time working mothers have little time to themselves. In some families where both parents have professional jobs, Hochschild found that they reconcile themselves to a drastically reduced notion of the emotional needs of a family.

Do working mothers put up with this inequity because they feel guilty about abandoning their families by going to work? Does assuming the burden of all the housework and child care serve as penitence for their transgression?

Time has become a commodity in our culture, most of all for working mothers. Many mothers hardly have time to get involved with child care. While there are clear exceptions, most parents want to drop off and pick up their children with a minimum of involvement.

The Emotional Distress of Using Care

The second thing to understand about mothers and a few fathers is that many do not find it easy to leave their children in child care. Though they may not want to admit it even to themselves, many — probably most — struggle with an inner voice that says they should stay home with their children, that their children may not be OK in child care. Many feel guilty, anxious, jealous, alienated, and otherwise conflicted about the choices they have made. It is not simple to be a mother these days.

In a report on focus groups of parents talking about child care, EDK Associates (1992) found that mothers feel guilty about leaving their children, terrified about what might happen while they are gone, and "fearful of losing their identity as the center of the child's life" (p. 3).

> Looking for child care was such a stressful experience that most mothers were desperate to see the problem resolved and feared that they would not find a good arrangement for their child. They settled on the first place that seemed "acceptable." This often meant having to find an alternative child care arrangement within a relatively short amount of time thereafter.
>
> [One mother said about her choice,] "I was afraid to go further. I just knew that I felt good about this and I just didn't want the hassle of interviewing. I just prayed that everything work out."
>
> (p. 4)

Caroline Zinsser's (1987) interviews with mothers confirm that choosing child care is extremely stressful. They freely reported feeling guilty and remorseful about leaving their children in care. One woman said, "I remember when I first went back to work with my first child, and it was like someone was stabbing me in the heart. I was thinking, 'Oh, my God!'" (p. 30)

Guilt. According to dominant U.S. cultural values, mothers are essentially responsible for their children and "how they turn out." The ideology of the child-centered mother (invented perhaps to fill women's increasing leisure time created by the urbanization and labor-saving inventions of the Industrial Revolution) has not yet been reconstructed to reflect the reality of women's lack of time when holding a full-time job. At this point in history, in spite of a full-time job, she is supposed to be "supermom" at home now more than ever. Guilt is the outcome of the clash between her identity as a career woman taking advantage of new opportunities and that of supermom, socialized as traditional wife and mother.

Galinsky (1990b) found that 68% of Atlanta mothers in the parent component of the National Child Care Staffing Study thought they should work less and spend more time with their children; 25% felt that it was better for children not to be in child care at all. Clearly, women are conflicted on this issue. They, like center directors, may feel trapped between a rock and a hard place, or they may feel resolved about the choices they have made, especially if they simply must work out of real economic necessity.

Most women fall someplace along the guilt dimension between these two extremes, depending upon how satisfied they are with their child care arrangement. Eula summarized her sense of the child care parents' feelings:

> For the most part, I don't think the parents mind leaving their children here. I comb all the girls' hair, brush the boys' hair, put lotion on it. They look better when they are picked up most times than when they got here in the morning. A lot of people appreciate that because the person who touches them, they don't mind so much leaving them.

A reporter quotes a mother who felt financially required to return to work:

> "That's what God meant for me — to stay home, cook and sew, and I can't do that. . . . I always enjoyed being involved in my older two's education. Last night was open house and my children wanted me to go. I bribed them — 'I'll let you bring friends over if I don't go.' That's what's happening to the American family. Nobody's there, and children don't have full time guidance."
>
> Measuring themselves against such an exacting, idealized standard, where good mothering equals how much time is spent with the children rather than how secure or happy the children are, many working women feel they fall short. For the most part, these women struggle without help from society of their employers, who seldom give them long maternity leaves or flexible hours. . . .
>
> [S]ome said they were making compromises that disturbed them. . . . Generally, though, most women say, with an air of surprise, that they believe their children are actually turning out all right even if working interferes with their ideal of a good mother.
>
> Still, many mothers worry that they may be deluding themselves. "It looks fine to me," Mrs. Lencki said, "but maybe I'm not looking."
>
> (Chira, 1992, p. 32)

What kind of price do mothers pay when they feel they are violating God's will? How do they explain God's intentions behind the Industrial Revolution?

Bergmann argues that some women exaggerate their need to work so as to overcome the stigma of using child care.

> A woman's allusion to her family's "need" for the money neatly fends off such accusations (and self-accusations) of callousness and triviality and invites inferences of self-sacrifice on her part.
>
> For some women, the invocation of the "need" for the money also serves to draw attention away from other benefits . . . that some might consider illicit when enjoyed by women . . .the company of other adults, . . . prestige, . . . a sense of independence, . . . outlet for talents and aggressiveness . . . . In sum, focusing on "need" serves to squelch accusations that she is not a true woman. (p. 32)

This interpretation is consistent with the other findings in this study.

Unfortunately, many mothers feel additional guilt when they enjoy their jobs and, perhaps secretly or even unconsciously, are glad they don't have to stay home with their children all the time (Chira, 1992; Galinsky, 1990b; Nelson, 1990). They may or may not recognize that they have gained increased self-esteem, social recognition and respect, and financial independence — all good for their children as well as themselves.

Ironically, mothers who stay at home with their young children often feel guilt that they are not fulfilling their potential. They may wonder if the extra income they could bring to the family if they worked would offset the advantage of their being at home. It's hard to be a mother at this time in U. S. cultural and economic history. Few mothers today feel content in their choices, regardless of the nature of the choice.

Sorrow. Sorrow is another emotion commonly felt by mothers who leave their children in care. Sometimes the sense of loss is so severe that it becomes real grief. Even when they have no choice but to work, or feel sure that they have made the right decision to work, many mothers feel sorrow over missing a good part of their children's childhood. Left unresolved, this grief may continue to haunt them for years to come.

Jealousy. Among other emotions, mothers whose young children are in child care often feel cheated out of the precious early moments with their young ones. Sometimes jealousy emerges and intrudes upon their relationship with the caregivers who get to be with their children all day. Joffe (1977) found that parents and nursery school teachers feel competition for power over the children as well as jealousy toward each other.[3]

Mothers are often ambivalent about the intimacy that develops between their children and the caregivers. Sometimes they consciously or unconsciously resent "the other woman" who gets to be with their children. They want their children to be loved, but they are less sure about the children loving in return. While one part of them may wholeheartedly support their children's close bonds with their caregivers, another part feels wounded, jealous, or insecure when this happens.

One mother, on seeing the caregiver lift up her child at a public event, said "I was jealous. It's something like a man and his wife and his mistress all being in the same room together." (Zinsser, 1987, pp. 76-77) Mothers in Zinsser's study struggled to maintain the sense that they were irreplaceable in their children's lives, as our culture tells them they should. Sometimes this caused them to criticize the caregivers and distance themselves from them. As we will see in the next section, most caregivers are insensitive to this need in mothers.

Fear. Especially in the last few years, parents have become frightened about what might happen to their children in care. Sensationalized media coverage of sexual abuse and drugged babies locked in closets have played into the guilt and anxiety parents already feel. People who believe that mothers belong at home promote these stories as proof. While children are probably statistically safer in child care than they are in their own homes, the vulnerability of very young children is real and we need to develop more effective ways to prevent their abuse in all settings.

Denial and Cognitive Dissonance. In a wide range of studies using superficial methodology, parents profess to be satisfied with the care their children receive. Yet when researchers look in depth, they usually find more dissatisfaction (Galinsky, 1990; Porter, 1991; Zinsser, 1987). Like job satisfaction ratings, these findings may be distorted by people's tendency to adapt to the situations they find themselves in and to report satisfaction if they are not actively trying to change the situation.

Another phenomenon operates here. Once nervous parents enroll their child in a program and it proves to be OK, they are so relieved that they become boosters of that program. They recommend it heartily to their friends, reassuring themselves at the same time.[4]

At mothers struggle with all these difficult feelings, cognitive dissonance creeps in, possibly reinforcing their feeling that it is not important work to care for little children, it takes little skill or involvement. As a mother protects herself from thinking about what her young child is doing all day, she may become invested in believing that he or she is doing nothing. If so, she isn't missing anything. Is that one reason why many parents are at a loss when asked what they think their children do all day in child care?

Some mothers in Nelson's study (1990) had convinced themselves that they were bestowing a favor on caregivers by leaving their children with them. "Giving love and daily care is 'naturalized' and trivialized as a part of the individual's personality rather than considered a service requiring financial reimbursement." (p. 68) As we saw in Chapter 3, most caregivers agree that they are privileged to be with young children. A few agree that the satisfaction they gain functions as supplemental compensation, but a majority feel that they should be paid fairly — they consider the satisfaction compensation for the hard work.

Most fathers do not seem to feel guilty about abandoning their children, or anxious about what might happen to them, or jealous that the caregivers get to be with their children. In our culture, fathers, in addition to leaving the work of arranging and maintaining care to their children's mothers, usually leave them to worry about it as well. If fathers understood how much their children are influenced by the quality of child care, they would undoubtedly get more involved.

Dislike of Caring for Children

Not surprisingly, all these stressful and conflicting feelings influence mothers' feelings toward their children. Some mothers reported to Nelson that they were not cut out to be at home with their children and could never do the work their caregivers' did. Meanwhile, the providers had usually chosen their work so they *could* be home with their own children, and many did not understand how mothers could bear to leave their young offspring. (This sentiment was voiced or alluded to by a sizable minority of center teachers in my study as well as a majority of providers.) Thus, neither mothers nor caregivers fully respect or comprehend the others' feelings.

While each of the 28 mothers in Zinsser's study said they needed to work for financial reasons, many also mentioned that they would not like staying home with children:

> "I sat home going out of my mind. I was very close to being institutionalized." [Such] admissions drew sympathetic laughs and sometimes corroboration from others. It was generally agreed that mothers who resented the tasks of child care should not stay home. "Sitting at home with my kid was not healthy for him, let alone for me," confessed one mother who had been eager to return to full-time work.
>
> (p. 45)

Several of my interviewees spoke of mothers who felt that they "could not" stay home with their own very young children — from the single-parent teacher aide who said to Eula, "I can't stay home with no two babies" to the hospital administrator who said "I just wasn't born to be with children." It is paradoxical that these mothers devalue the caregiver's skills and responsibilities, given how dependent they are upon them.

It is now socially acceptable, at least in some groups, for mothers to admit they dislike caring for their own children. Do they then, perhaps unconsciously, look down on women who choose to work with young children?

Over-Indulgence. Some mothers are so disturbed by their guilty feelings that they deny them altogether. They may overcompensate, becoming extremely involved with their children, "but it's not a good involvement. Usually it's a hovering, intrusive involvement that manifests itself in an inability to set limits." (Jay Belsky quoted in Meltz, 1992, p. 68) Sometimes these mothers deny themselves any free time, devoting every salvageable moment to their children. They may push their children to succeed as proof that they are doing well. In trying to compensate for their perceived inadequacy as mothers, they create over-indulged, anxious children. Children who grow up with a combination of permissiveness and neglect may be unfilled and obnoxious. Expecting to be entertained at all times by their parents, teachers, or "electronic baby-sitters," how can they develop their own interests, sense of autonomy, or perseverance?[5] How can they be happy when the wider world fails to meet their expectations? They may not be very likeable, even to their own parents.

Enjoyment of Working Outside the Home. Cultural differences in the messages mothers receive from their friends and families affect mothers differently:

> These days, some more affluent and educated women say they would feel embarrassed to tell their friends that they did not work. Yet many working-class mothers who have found that they are happy working treat it like a guilty secret. Mrs. Lencki dropped her voice almost to a whisper when she talked about enjoying her job, despite her guilt that her youngest son had not had her full-time presence.
>
> (Chira, 1992, p. 32)

So many conflicting cultural messages are part of the lives of every American mother of young children that most probably feel some guilt, self-doubt, and profound ambivalence, regardless of the choices they make.

Jeopardized Attachment. Some mothers today seem nearly as ill-at-ease with their own children as their husbands tend to be. Do some parents learn how to be with young children, even if it does not come naturally to them, simply through being with them? When they hire out the caregiving and disciplining relationship, are they left feeling not quite bonded with their own offspring?

Child development researchers describe the fragile attachment process of mothers and sometimes fathers as they learn how to be with their babies during the first few months of life. Pediatrician Berry Brazelton observes that mothers who anticipate having to put their newborn babies in full-time child care sometimes experience a detachment of their feelings akin to mourning. Sometimes they begin distancing themselves from this baby, whom they will soon have to leave, before the end of their pregnancies (Personal communication, February, 1986). This phenomenon is not healthy for either mother or child, and is likely to affect the quality of their relationship for years to come. Brazelton advocates paid maternity leave of at least four months for exactly this reason.

Brazelton's observation suggests that parents can become unnaturally alienated from parenting when they turn child care over to others before establishing a solid relationship. (Is this the same phenomenon that occurs in fathers when they leave the "kid stuff" to their wives?) What toll does such alienation take from the children, the quality of family life, and parents' personal sense of responsibility and generativity? Would parents who say they do not have the patience to "be good with their own children" in fact develop patience and the courage to set limits if they spent a little more time with them? I believe so, in some cases at least.

In our society, even with weak parental leave legislation, some employers will not hold a mother's job while she stops working to give birth. Others will hold the job only if she returns within a few weeks. In truly pro-family societies, governmental policies support families at this critical time, often with several months or even a year or more of paid leave (Kamerman & Kahn, 1991). If we could accurately compare the real costs and benefits of each approach we would no doubt find pro-family policies financially as well as socially and psychologically rewarding.

Contentment, A Variation on the Theme of Stress

In contrast to the psychological chaos that erupts when the cult of motherhood meets today's overworked women, I must say explicitly that this does not happen in all cases. In my years as a child care teacher-director and many more observing parents, I have encountered many women who show very different feelings. They have found good child care and resolved their own sense of themselves as both mothers and workers. It is possible for parents and children to treasure the moments they have together and also treasure those in their lives outside the home. Some fathers, often from the same families, are very involved with the children and sometimes with the child care. Galinsky & Hughes (1988) and others have noted that mothers who believe that it is fine to work when their children are in beneficial child care arrangements are happy themselves and they tend to have happy children.

The reporter quoted above notes that most of mothers of the current generation of mothers stayed home with their children. "Generally, though, most women say, with an air of surprise, that they believe their children are actually turning out all right, even if working interferes with their ideal of a good mother." (Chira, 1992, p. 32)

Child Care, Quick and Cheap — A Paradox

The distress that most mothers and some fathers feel about hiring someone else to be with their children much of the time stands in apparent contradiction to parents' behavior around choosing and using child care.

Most mothers of very young children look for a caregiver who will give their children what they would if they could — a substitute for themselves. Of course, what this *means* varies by cultural group, social class, and individual preferences. Usually mothers use word-of-mouth recommendations from their friends as their most important source of information. They trust their friends' testimonials not only because they have passed the test of time with a child care program, but also because they assume they share personal values such as discipline and religion.

The Speedy Search for Child Care. Despite or because of the high level of stress many mothers feel about leaving their children in care, most do not shop around for the best child care they can find. Parent referral counsellors report that most parents who call them (almost always mothers) do not visit several child care programs to select the best one. These counsellors confirm the finding that parents tend to settle on the first program they find that is acceptable. In the interviews for this study, one center teacher referred to parents "parking their children" at the center.

Child care directors and providers confirm that many parents are not willing to visit a program before they decide to enroll a child. One parent brochure urges, "Your child may spend up to 2,000 hours a year in child care. Don't spend ten minutes making your decision." (University of Michigan Family Care Resource Program, no date) Actually 2,000 hours is low if parents work full time. So why do most parents spend little time making their decision? I believe parents tend to spend more time shopping around for a car than they do for child care. Why?

The Drive to Pay Less. As seen in the previous chapter, keeping cost low is a primary consideration of most parents in choosing care. Concern about cost does not seem to be particularly related to ability to pay. Why do parents who can afford more look for child care on the cheap? What does all this reveal about their values? Are other consumer desires more important than their children's daily experience? They seem not to value the quality of this experience, reproducing the cultural devaluation discussed in Chapter 6. Can this be true? Or is something else going on here?

Why Don't Parents Shop Around? We have seen that parents do not spend much time looking for child care. Is it because they think what happens there doesn't matter very much? Are they pessimistic about what they will find? Some probably are. Do they also try to avoid thinking about it because they feel guilty, ambivalent, or anxious about leaving their children in care? Do they find it soothing to believe that what happens in child care is not very important? Or that nothing really happens there, nothing they should worry about, nothing they are missing out on? I believe that the question of why parents don't spend more time searching for good child care can be explained only by considering such defense mechanisms.

A final implication of these conclusions is that middle- and upper-income parents are hiring caregivers at wages considerably lower than they themselves earn, and without health or retirement benefits. The Zoe Baird case, for example, called national attention to wealthy families who do not pay taxes or Social Security on their child care workers. Child care becomes another commodity of the marketplace, such a deal. These "liberated" mothers have gained many of the privileges of patriarchy at the expense of child care workers. As noted by a couple of the interviewees, they have truly left other women, the caregivers, behind.

Discouragement. One element of the explanation is that even when parents look hard, they sometimes cannot find high-quality child care — sometimes it simply isn't affordable or available. The grapevine in most communities asserts that it is very hard to find good care for infants and toddlers, often rightly so. Parents feel discouraged and perhaps somewhat desperate before they begin looking for child care.[6] Good child care homes and centers usually have waiting lists, and long ones when the economy is strong.

Many parents feel inadequate to interpret the differences among child care programs. The theme, "I don't know what to look for" is especially common among first-time child care users. Something is fundamentally wrong with a society where parents come to feel incapable of making good decisions about the care of their own children.

In my experience, most mothers usually know intuitively what would be good for their children and what would not. As they discuss their reactions to different caregivers and environments, they are often sophisticated in their intuitions. Even when they do not have ready language to describe their assessments, they usually identify criticisms or appreciations that are in fact well grounded in child development and early education theory: "The teachers were a bunch of cold fish." "Imagining being a child, I wouldn't want to spend the day there myself." "The kids looked kind of bored." "I didn't like her own children."

Dissatisfaction. As described earlier, various surveys have found that at least 85% of parents report being satisfied with their children's child care (Galinsky, 1990). But when researchers take a closer look, they find considerable dissatisfaction (Galinsky, 1990; Porter, 1991; Zinsser, 1987). For example, Galinsky reports that three out of four parents in the Atlanta study had found no satisfactory alternative to the child care program they were using at the time (there is no evidence about the extent of their search). Although earlier in the study most of these parents reported being satisfied with their present child care, 53% said they would have chosen another alternative if they had had a choice.

Only one of the 28 mothers in Zinsser's discussion groups reported being dissatisfied with her current child care situation. But many reported feeling that they had no choice. The author notes that it is difficult and painful for parents to admit that their children are in less-than-desirable child care.

> Women spoke repeatedly of the necessity to make the best of what was available. . . . One woman described the "no choice" dilemma of parents using a poor-quality center. "It's like they have the parents over a barrel." I found that most of the parents felt that there was nothing they could do. And one parent even told me, "Well, it's all depressing and this is the lesser of the evils." It's like, "Well, this is the best of a bad bunch, but what are you going to do?" . . . So they tolerated it. They knew that it was no optimum, it wasn't what they wanted but they settled for it.
>
> (p. 42)

Zinsser does not comment on what these mothers did to look for the best available care, but it is likely that many took the first satisfactory opening they found, as most parents do. The paradoxical question of why concerned parents do not look harder and longer for care becomes even more complex if they feel they are settling for care that they know not to be good.

Toni Porter's study of low-income mothers in New Jersey (1991) found that the mothers were usually dissatisfied with their children's child care, by the constant staff turnover, the lack of individual attention to their children, and the number of contagious diseases their children caught.

> These mothers were frustrated, concerned, and angry, but they had no other choices. Many of them did not have cars. . . . They worked odd hours, leaving at six in the morning or returning at eleven at night. There were no spaces in the "good" programs. They had to use the nearest program that would take their child.
>
> (p. 20)

But to the contrary, teen mothers, whose babies tended to be cared for by female relatives, usually reported being happy with the care their babies received.

In conclusion, most mothers who work full time are burdened. Both their time and emotional energy are chronically strained. Their involvement in their children's care, already minimized by a lack of appreciation of its importance, may be further reduced by their need to repress their guilt, sadness, anxiety, and dissatisfaction. They may want to believe that nothing happens in child care, so it is not important. It is alarming to consider that many mothers and some fathers experience the degree of turmoil over using child care that these studies suggest. What early childhood professionals have interpreted as indifference must be reinterpreted so that we may better understand how to work with parents.

The Caregiver's Perspective

Leaving the life-world of parents, we turn to that of caregivers. The perspective of the "good" caregivers interviewed for this study conflicts with that of mothers in three important ways. First, they usually believe that mothers *should* stay home with their babies and they are critical of those who don't. They also criticize mothers, once they begin using child care, for not being more interested in the child's daily experience. Second, they usually feel that parents, at least some parents, take advantage of caregivers. And third, they believe the quality of much of child care is not very good. While parents may feel it is satisfactory to leave a child in a program that offers only custodial care, caregivers understand how much more children need to thrive.

Criticism of Parents

In spite of the rhetoric paid to the importance of building partnerships with parents, many caregivers harshly criticize parents. I have been in several gatherings of center teachers and providers where parents are generally derided. Such criticism has been reported by Galinsky (1988, 1990), Greenberg (1989), and Kontos and Well (1986). Some caregivers are less critical of parents who are white and highly educated and more critical of those who are low-income or divorced. Class differences in beliefs about the appropriateness of discussing family issues with caregivers (Kontos and Wells, 1986; Powell, 1977) and authoritarian child rearing (Galinsky, 1988) contribute to these conflicts.

They Should Be Home With Their Children. Ironically, many caregivers don't really believe in child care for infants and toddlers. Galinsky (1990) found that 24% of center teachers disapproved of mothers of preschoolers who worked. (A similar 25% of the parents in the study agreed that young children were better off home with their parents, and fully 68% thought they should work less and spend more time with their children.) I have heard this sentiment expressed so often, by such different types of caregivers, that I believe it is widespread. Numerous times I have been at a meeting or class where someone asks, "Would you put your own baby in child care?" I've never seen a group where many answered "yes." While "no" is the socially acceptable answer in this crowd, they often feel strongly that middle- and upper-income mothers who use child care for their babies are misguided, selfish, and shirking a fundamental responsibility.

In Chapter 3, we saw that one of the subtle satisfactions caregivers find in their work is a sense of responsibility from taking care of children. If they feel that mothers have abandoned their responsibility, they gain this pleasure at the mothers' expense. Some feel that mothers who don't have the patience to "be good with young children" are better off using child care. They may support these working mothers for their choices or they may disrespect them.

Good caregivers who are also parents (the great majority) often believe they give a higher priority to their own children's needs when making career decisions more than do most parents. Some are truly unusually child-centered people. The cult of motherhood survives among child care workers.

It is not uncommon to hear well-educated, experienced child care workers assert that it is impossible to provide good infant care in centers under any circumstances — good enough, that is, for their children or grandchildren. Good child care for babies may be possible in a homey setting, they feel, but it is rare. These same people usually believe that good child care is good for preschoolers, and that toddlers may benefit from a small, part-day program like a playgroup. As might be expected, center teachers feel less strongly on this issue than do family child care providers, many of whom give as their first reason for choosing this work: "To be home with my own children."[7]

The "us" and "them" quality behind these attitudes contributes to and reproduces the two separate worlds of mothers and caregivers. There is a great deal of blame in the caregivers' stories. The early childhood profession as a whole has not focused on this issue and how it undermines parent-caregiver relationships. We pay lip service to building the partnership, but tacitly support the intolerance. Because caregivers are not confrontational people on the whole, they do not voice their opinions. They think that doing so would probably not change anything except perhaps to add to the mother's guilt, or perhaps to subtract from the caregivers' paychecks.

The feeling that parents should be more involved in their children's care is a logical extension of the same attitude. "At least, if you are going to leave your child, you should care about the details of his/her daily life." Good caregivers appreciate parents who stay for perhaps 15 minutes in the morning or afternoon to get to know the children's friends, to hear details of the child's day, to watch what he or she does in this environment. Let me add that, unfortunately, many less good teachers and providers do not want to be bothered with parents. They are glad parents want to drop off and pick up their children as quickly as possible. But they still criticize them as parents.

Inconsiderateness. The theme of parents taking advantage of caregivers emerged from most of the interviews for this study. The small daily signs are the most obvious. Pet peeves of caregivers in centers and homes alike include when parents:

- bring sick children to care or do not come when called to pick up a sick child
- chronically pick up their children after closing time
- do not pay their bills on time or bounce checks
- forget to bring spare clothes, formula, or diapers
- do not send their children dressed adequately to play outside
- do not inform caregivers when something important is happening in the child's life

Caregivers understand that parents, in their hurried lives, may simply forget to mention that a traumatic event happened to the child over the weekend; they understand that it was because the parents were so rushed when they left home that they did not check for mittens, scarf, hat, snow pants, *and* boots. They understand, but they do not forgive. "One woman reported angrily that when she chided a mother for not picking up her child on time, the mother responded, 'I didn't realize you had anything else to do.'" (Nelson, 1990, p. 55) They tend to feel that mothers shouldn't take jobs from which it will be impossible to leave if a child gets sick. They resent parents who have trouble paying their child care fees but manage to pay the supermarket, the car dealer, and "everybody else except us."

Lack of Respect. It is extremely important for caregivers to feel appreciated by the parents in their programs. In spite of their low pay, most caregivers do not think parents should pay more. They believe they can't afford it, but "at least they could pay their respect." We saw in Chapters 3 and 4 that recognition by parents is a major predictor of job satisfaction in child care workers, which ameliorates their dissatisfactions. In Nelson's study (1990), words of gratitude and recognition were treasured as much as bonuses and gifts.[8] When teachers and providers feel that parents appreciate them, they are more willing to put up with lack of appreciation from others as well as low wages. Obviously these concerns are intertwined with mothers' lack of time as described in the previous section.

Here is the caregiver's version of cognitive dissonance: "Even though all these mothers go off to better-paid, more respected jobs, *I* care about little children. I make a difference in their lives."

In Joffe's study of cooperative nursery schools (1977), she observed that staff members feel a lack of status in parents' eyes. Joffe argues that teachers feel ambivalent about positing their own professional judgment over parents' intuitive understanding of a situation. On the one hand, teachers want to be seen by parents as professional educators, respected for their expertise. They want to be recognized for their important contributions to children's development. On the other hand, they also want to see parents as partners and to defer to parents' authority about their own children (p. 50) — from this study I would add that they often want to see parents as colleagues or friends as well. Joffe questions whether such personalized activities undermine the professionalism that early educators seek to establish. She also hints that parents and teachers feel jealousy toward each other and competition for power, which suggests one possible motive for parents to devalue teachers.

On the other hand, just as some parents are deeply appreciative of their caregivers, some caregivers are extremely empathic toward parents. Michele, the provider in this study who was distressed at the idea of having to move away from the children she had grown to love, also worried about the mothers' feelings:

> I've had times when parents feel just a little insecure, threatened. Right now I have this 11-month old who doesn't want to go with her mom. I'm with her 50 hours every week. She turns out of her mom's arms, and comes to me. . . . I don't really believe she's more attached to me. I think I'm as secure as her mother. In a few weeks they'll be in a new phase, and the opposite [they'll prefer to go to their mothers]. Then around two-and-a-half it all gets easy.
>
> I feel the earlier a child starts, the more I form a bonding with the child. Andrew was 1 week, Katie was 3 months when they came here. We're really bonded to each other. They're bonded to their parents as well. There's no reason babies can't bond to more than one person.

This providers' belief that it is healthy for babies to become attached to caregiver as well as parents is corroborated by the stories of children from cultures where mothers are not expected to be the primary caregivers. In countries where child care is genuinely supported by government and citizens alike, such as Sweden, Denmark, France, Israel, and the previous Soviet Bloc nations, mothers go off to work confident that their children are content and well-cared for. In some cultures, large extended families or the village as a whole shares in child rearing. Mothers in those situations are less likely to feel inadequate when they see their children dependent upon and attached to other adults. No construct of the child-centered mother has colored their perceptions.

Ethnocentrism. Caregivers are less aware of the degree to which their judgments of parents are classist, racist, or ethnocentric. Kontos and Well (1986) found that both black and white caregivers are more supportive of white parents, as well as educated and married parents. The currently accepted ideology in the field supports middle-class parenting styles. How can we reconcile our professed desire to offer multi-cultural programs with parents' conflicting values? What do we really mean by "parental choice"? A classic value conflict revolves around authoritarian vs. democratic child management styles, but issues such as the individual vs. the group, manners, and indeed the ideal role for children have not been addressed.

Caregiver Distress

We have seen in this study that child care as an occupation, and thus child care itself, is in trouble. But little progress has been made to rectify the problems.

Denial. Many caregivers are aware of the problems, when they stop to think about them. But it is troubling to think about them. They usually understand that their work is underpaid, but they believe that neither parents nor government can afford to pay more. They accept that in child care you have to skimp on materials and equipment. Teachers are the first to experience the disruption when a knowledgeable colleague quits and a less skillful replacement is hired, or no replacement is hired. These factors restrict the quality of care and education they can offer. Most caregivers realize on some level that child care is underfunded. They also understand that taking care of children does not earn the respect it deserves because it is traditional women's work. As we saw in the chapter on dissatisfactions, caregivers can be articulate and insightful on these subjects. But they tend to minimize their attention to these issues.

Lack of Action. Many child care workers understand the problems, but few *do* anything about them. In the interview transcripts there were only the vaguest hints of anybody speaking up or taking action to call attention to the problems they identified, let alone pursuing solutions. These child care workers like others across the country and in all kinds of settings are likely to work in the field as long as they can tolerate the problems, and then to quit. All the while, their voices will remain silent on the subject of their dissatisfactions.

Having been a child care worker myself and having spent a good deal of time with many diverse child care workers, this finding does not surprise me. My intuitive explanation is that these people are what they themselves might term "too nice." They tend to put other peoples' needs ahead of their own. They accept their own devaluation with passivity. They don't like to rock boats. As one public school principal said about "his" child care workers (whose compensation was well below the district's standard pay scale): "They are not aggressive individuals." Most of the good child care workers in this study fit the cultural stereotype of "good girls." Many assume quite traditional roles in relation to their own families. This is especially true of family child care providers, who often choose this work because it allows them to be at home, not only for their own children but also for their husbands (Nelson, 1990) and themselves. Many readily admit to being "homebodies."

So I am not surprised that most early childhood workers do not tend to speak up for themselves and what they need and deserve. With resignation they accept their own denigration, or move on to other work.

But it is more difficult to understand why these dedicated caregivers do not speak up for the children they believe to be so helpless and so worthy. Many understand on some level that the care they offer is far from ideal and thus that the children are being shortchanged. Some feel that it is a travesty that child care in our nation does not receive more support. Is it not irresponsible to remain inactive in the face of such beliefs? These people are not lazy, or scared of being perceived as different. And yet they remain silent. Why?

Resignation and Hopelessness. Child care workers feel nearly as marginal in society as do domestic workers and usually they are paid less. In Chapter 4 we saw that some child care workers feel that parents treat them like maids or in otherwise demeaning ways. Often parents hold unreasonable expectations for caregivers, such as that they work overtime without notice, or care for a sick child in spite of the caregivers' policies to the contrary.

The experiences of domestic workers described by Judith Rollins (1985) show some similarity to child care workers and some differences. One difference between the two groups is that, unlike domestic workers, child care workers feel enthusiastic about the content of their work and believe it to be important. Another critical difference is that most of Rollins' interviewees were black, working for white employers, whereas most people in this study were the same race as the majority of families in their programs (this pattern holds nationally).

Rollins identifies a phenomenon she calls "*ressentiment*" among domestic workers. This attitude evolves when a person has strong negative feelings toward another who has power over her life, but is unable to express these feeling because of powerlessness or fear. This attitude is most likely to arise when the person feels she is being treated unfairly. Having no recourse, she develops a sense of impotence which eventually grows into *ressentiment*.

Rollins reports that most of the domestics in her study understood that their employers' superior positions were unearned — obtained through the privilege of class and race. They did not consider themselves inferior because of the work they did. Even when their interactions with employers were relatively egalitarian, most were aware of the hardships they suffered because of their low incomes. Some domestics Rollins interviewed perceived their own lifestyles and values as superior to their employers':

> Today's domestic (or at least, the American-born woman in the [Boston area is]), fully aware of an egalitarian philosophy of human worth and opportunity, more psychologically and materially independent than her predecessors (and less fortunate segments of the contemporary pool), defines herself by her family, her church, her organizations, her place in her community. She neither buys into the employer's definition of herself nor her work situation. Like other blue-collar workers who consider their 'real' lives that part that is away from their jobs, domestics' 'real' identities come from other than work-related activities. (p. 225)

Awareness of their own powerlessness to change their situations, combined with inability to express their outrage at the exploitation, causes a deep and pervasive sense of *ressentiment*. This is not simple resentment according to Rollins — it is long term, pervasive, and seething. She reports that this feeling insulates domestic workers from the psychological damage of internalizing their employers' negative views of themselves as people, in spite of being treated as unintelligent, incompetent non-persons or children. (I wonder if these particular women were more aware of their own oppression than other domestics are?)

On the whole, unlike Rollins' domestic workers, child care workers do not blame anyone for their low salaries and low status. Their lack of awareness of the sources of their devaluation is a critical factor in their passivity and resignation.

I asked a few of the interviewees why they thought teachers and providers do not speak out more about the problems they had described. Typically they shrugged and asked, "What could be done?" They felt that neither parents nor the government can afford to pay more than they now pay for child care. Most saw no reason why corporations should be responsible for doing anything to support child care. They accept the cultural norm: young children are the sole responsibility of their parents.

Most important, contrary to Rollins' interviewees' understanding of the role of race and class in causing their exploitation, child care workers do not understand themselves to be oppressed at all. Because they have no one to direct their anger toward, it does not get expressed — or often perceived. It does not get named. Instead of experiencing anger, most interviewees felt a passive disappointment and resignation. These feelings do not have *ressentiment's* effect of insulating them from psychological damage.

Worthlessness. Do resentful caregivers turn their unfocused, unexpressed frustrations inward against themselves, feeling a decreased sense of self-worth? Many do, although my sample probably over-represents those who do not — only Annie seemed fully aware of the tendency for child care workers to internalize society's negative values even though they contradict their own beliefs. She said that because society does not respect child care workers, child care workers do not respect child care workers. Annie knew she was about to leave her job, and was more reflective of her feelings about the status issues than were other interviewees. They, even those who were incensed about society's negative image of their work, seemed not to have thought about how this low status affected them. But it is revealed in statements such as one teachers' describing her reluctance to take her first child care job: "I never heard people say very much about day care workers." Several times I have heard caregivers complain about how seldom you see child care in television sit-coms even though every child care scandal gets prominent news coverage.

Bill Ayers, in *The Good Preschool Teacher: Six Teachers Reflect on Their Lives*, addresses this issue. Quoting Daniel Lortie (1975), he notes that the low status of teachers creates

> a kind of denial of self, a discourse that is "self-accusing rather than self-accepting" (Lortie, p.159). Each of the teachers in this study is articulate and precise in her condemnation of the low status of teaching and is acutely aware of the ways preschool teaching is further devalued and of the even further gradations and degradations of day care and family day care. And yet, ironically, each has also internalized aspects of the lowly status and each participates in subtle ways in a kind of self-condemnation. For example, I discovered that each was surprised that someone wanted to study her, and in the beginning a common concern that the teachers had was that they would have nothing to contribute. (p. 134)

I too found many interviewees who participated in subtle self-condemnation. But they had the opposite reaction to my wanting to interview them; almost to a person, they expressed some version of the theme: "It's about time someone wanted to know about this important work." Often they were filled with gratitude that I wanted to tell their stories. The question is, why weren't they telling their own stories?

One form of evidence of the denigration of their work is that teachers and providers alike think of their jobs as second-rate. As seen in Chapter 4, many of those interviewed talked about some variation on the theme that child care is not a "real job". The Vermont family child care providers interviewed by Margaret Nelson devalued the skill involved in their work. They saw themselves as natural mothers, not skilled teachers. One said "I think that anyone that has taken care of kids for as long as I have, sisters and brothers and all the kids I've taken care of, can do this work." They scorn the idea that formal training is necessary, while minimizing their own experiential knowledge or special temperaments. Nelson recognizes that

> Providers buy into the cultural denigration that comes from the fact that these tasks are passed from one women to another. And although some recognize that they have acquired expertise, others refuse to acknowledge that what they have is anything of value: "Teaching takes skills. But this? I don't know. Instinct is more what you need and a lot of patience."
>
> Given this self-denigration they have difficulty thinking that they should be richly rewarded. (1990, p. 90)

The sense of worthlessness and passivity felt by most of my interviewees came through in a wide range of examples. For instance, one teacher said she and two other teachers at her center had discussed the possibility of unionizing, "but no union ever approached us." These workers have condemned themselves to swallow their dissatisfactions. Why did they not approach a union?

Consider the pattern that so many of the interviews took: first the good news. Only after they had clearly articulated their satisfactions did the dissatisfactions emerge. Was it because these people did not feel justified in complaining? Even Annie, whose interview is one long lament, kept trying to justify why she was quitting the field. It seemed that she wanted to reassure us both that she deserved better.

One final and dramatic phenomenon captures caregivers' feeling that they are not worth more. When told that several research studies have found that parents — at least some parents — are ready to pay more for child care than they now do, a surprising number of child care workers are disbelieving and sometimes angry. Chapter 4 cited the finding that 60% of the parents in the National Day Care Home Study would have been willing to pay more for their child care (Divine-Hawkins, 1981). In specific cases, parents who have been informed about the low incomes and lack of benefits of their teacher-caregivers have been the first to suggest that they pay more. Yet when this information is cited, most child care professionals disbelieve it. "Not around here they can't," said one teacher who cared for the children of many highly paid hospital administrators. I have witnessed this paradoxical response several times.

As we have seen, the low status of child care as work is so deeply embedded in this culture that it is nearly invisible. As child care workers take for granted their low pay and low status — and sometimes even defend this position — they show they have internalized society's low opinion of their work and turned it against themselves. This dynamic meshes with the low self-esteem that characterizes child care workers. It explains why they accept the situation as hopeless.

The Culture of Silence

Paulo Freire (1970, 1973) describes the tendency for oppressed people to live in a culture of silence, submerged as spectators in a reality that is taken for granted.

> Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. . . . As long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they fatalistically "accept" their exploitation. Further, they are apt to react in a passive and alienated manner when confronted with the necessity to struggle for their freedom and self-affirmation. . . .
>
> It is only when the oppressed . . . become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action. . . . It is extremely unlikely that these self-mistrustful, downtrodden, hopeless people will seek their own liberation. (1970, pp. 49-52)

Both mothers and caregivers are submerged in a culture of silence. In the essay, "Society in Transition" (1973), Freire describes how people can overcome the role of object in responding to the world around them. Through dialogue they can develop a critical and comprehensive understanding of their reality, expose its myths, and substitute an understanding of cause and effect for magical thinking. As they become aware of their potential, hopelessness begins to be replaced by hope. They increase their capacity to make choices and to transform their own reality, becoming the subjects of their own actions.

The Caregivers' Version

This analysis applies to child care workers as well as Third World peasants. Their exploitation is evident in their degree of pay inequity, the lack of respect for their work, and, despite their strong dissatisfactions, their passive acceptance of the situation and belief that nothing can be done to improve it. Freire recognizes that the complex forms of oppression in the United States are particularly impersonal, invisible, and dispersed. This makes it more difficult to identify the causes of the problems as well as the potential solutions.

Freire's description of oppressed people matches many of my interviewees remarkably well. Child care workers do fatalistically accept their exploitation. The prediction that they are unlikely to seek their own liberation mirrors the passivity of these workers.

The role of leaders in Freire's research is problem-posing, or problematizing: to promote dialogue that focuses people's attention on a critical analysis of the problematic reality (1968). No matter how submerged they are in a culture of silence, all people are capable of looking critically at their social reality, perceiving the contradictions within it, and choosing to transform injustice. As they become subjects instead of objects of their situation, argues Friere, they gain a new sense of awareness, dignity, and hope.

Freire's description of the anger that exploited people may feel toward "the messenger" who describes their oppression further explains child care workers' anger at hearing the information that some parents, employers, and government could pay more. Leaders who try to bring change to such situations are often seen as a threat. Such a threat is particularly likely to be felt by child care workers because they are so invested in being "nice," so reluctant to be critical of others.

Another factor that keeps caregivers from speaking up about the lack of quality in child care is that they do not want to scare vulnerable parents who must depend upon it. Child care has already suffered from an unduly poor reputation, thanks in part to the sensationalist media. Caregivers do not recognize that they are being short-sighted, irresponsible, or unprofessional to remain silent about their concerns for the field.

The relative failure of the child care union movement is explained by child care workers' extreme avoidance of conflict, especially with the parents in their programs. Even bringing workers together in critical dialogue is proving to be an extremely difficult first step, although the Worthy Wage Movement promises to be an effective strategy.

No one is more aware of the enormity of the task of mobilizing child care workers to improve their compensation than Jim Morin, an ex-center teacher-director who became an organizer for UAW District 65. Morin (1989) argues that the essential conditions for raising caregivers' incomes begin with their awareness of their own exploitation. Then they must confront parents. In a succinct analysis of the nature of organizing in this field, *Taking Action*, he writes

> As long as child care is relatively affordable to parents, they have little incentive to find ways of meeting increased child care costs. Parents will only become involved in seeking additional resources to meet the costs of increased compensation when it is in their own interest to do so. Like everyone else, parents have too many complex demands on their time and energy to solve problems that don't really exist for them. Insisting that parents assume more responsibility for meeting the true costs of quality child care is essential. If parents discover they can't meet increased costs on their own, they in turn must present this problem for public resolution.
>
> (p. 11)

Significant improvements in child care will come only when parents become an organized constituency and exercise their political power to increase support from their own employers, state and local government, and the federal government. Parents must gain a better sense of their own responsibility for solving the problem of affordable, quality child care. As long as they are not economically and practically motivated to seek solutions to this problem, the problem will remain unsolved.

The Parent's Version

Mothers are caught in their own culture of silence. Although their concerns are different from child care workers', the essential phenomenon is the same. They too are trapped in an unsatisfactory situation from which they see no escape. Oppressed by the conditions of their lives, they have little time or energy to deal with their concerns. Feeling powerless, they do not expect powerful decision-makers to care about their needs.

Instead of taking action to rectify the problems, they passively and fatalistically try to ignore them. They may resist critical dialogue for fear that it will shake the already-weak defenses upon which their lives depend, as described earlier in this chapter. Or they may complain with no hope of changing anything. They tend to see any problems as specific to their immediate situations. By the time they fully comprehend the inadequacy of our national child care non-system, their children no longer need child care.

Overcoming Estrangement

> When an obstacle to union arises, energetic biting through brings success. . . .
> Deliberate obstruction of this sort does not vanish of its own accord. . . .
>
> (*The I Ching,* Wilhelm, 1967, pp. 86-89)

Mothers and caregivers carry on in their separate life-worlds, each oblivious to the others' pain. Far from establishing unity, they contribute to each other's problems. For example, when caregivers blame mothers, directly or indirectly, for not spending more time with their children, they exacerbate the guilt and time pressure that mothers feel. This has a discouraging and alienating effect on mothers, already overloaded with emotional demands. It is likely to cause mothers to resent the caregiver and seek to minimize their interactions so as to minimize further criticism. Of course this behavior in turn adds to the caregivers' resentment.

Similarly, as mothers justify to themselves the importance of the work that draws them away from their children, they simultaneously devalue the work of caring for children. This is likely to cause an unconscious lowering of their esteem of the caregiver. Directly or indirectly this devaluation is communicated to the caregiver.

Caregivers and mothers vent their frustrations at each other, unaware of their common "over-a-barrel" predicaments (Nelson, 1990; Zinsser, 1987). They may get caught in a downward spiral as a sequence of small injuries gradually develops into deeper resentment. Their partnership, so necessary to the child's well-being, is undermined, sometimes poisoned. As this happens among individual caregivers and parents, it also sets the tone for their child care programs. They could join together in a coalition to challenge the wider cultural and political system that oppresses them, but the domination of these negative values is reinforced by these women's lack of time, money, and resources.

> The very people who are desperate for a national policy to deal with their struggles in juggling family and work responsibilities are the least able to become major advocates. They don't have the time or energy. They are struggling to keep their heads above water.
>
> (Barringer, 1992, p.A22)

Mothers and caregivers share the powerlessness of their gender. Fathers, if they understood how their children are being short-changed, might become powerful advocates for social change. We have not begun to reach them with this message. Only when fathers truly value their offspring and their childhood experiences will children get their full measure of support.

The underfunding of child care will not be addressed in the fundamental way necessary to produce the required transformation of cultural and economic values until these two groups join together for their common good. And this will not occur until each group steps back from their resentments to take an empathic look at the other's oppression.

While it may be frightening to face the enormity of the change required as well as the personal hurts that must be overlooked, it is the only responsible alternative. We must overcome our aversion to confrontation, first within ourselves, then with each other. We must somehow find the energy, in spite of our discouragement and work overloads, to bite through.

When parents and caregivers, the two parties to the contract of child care, recognize their mutual interests and join together as a unified political force — then and only then will the problems in child care be rectified.

Notes to Chapter 8

[1] *Worlds Apart: Relationships Between Families and Schools* is the title of Sara Lawrence Lightfoot's book about these two separate and discontinuous worlds (1978). Her analysis overlaps with mine at the deepest level of economic inequity and political ideology, although the superficial details are different because public schools are surprisingly different from child care. Sometimes the roles are reversed, with public school teachers sharing characteristics of some child care mothers, and caregivers resembling Lightfoot's disenfranchised mothers. But the level of conflict and tension caused by the oppression of both groups of women "Their generalized low status makes them perfect targets for each other's abuse, not daring to strike out at the more powerful and controlling groups in this society who are most responsible for their demeaned social and economic position." (p. 69)

[2] Although Nelson's sample consisted of predominantly white and frequently rural Vermonters, most of her findings ring true to my work with providers and parents of varied demographics.

[3] Joffe argues that, on the one hand, teachers want to be seen by parents as professional educators respected for their expertise. They want to be recognized for their important contributions to children's development. On the other hand, they also want to see "parents as partners" and defer to parents' authority concerning their own children (p. 50). From this study I would add that often caregivers see parents as colleagues or friends as well, although these feelings are not necessarily reciprocated. Joffe questions whether such personalized activities undermine the professionalism that early educators seek to establish.

[4] Thanks to Leslie DePietro for this insight.

[5] One generation ago, mothers were not so extreme on this trait. I remember it being common practice for mothers in the 60s to tell their children to "go play outside" and literally close them out of the house even if they were unhappy about it. These mothers felt they deserved time for themselves or to be able to accomplish their chores in peace and quiet. Perhaps this was analogous to mothers' going out to work today.

[6] Thanks to Leslie DePietro for this insight.

[7] Our Wheelock Study of The Economics of Family Child Care is collecting data about this question. We will analyze the differences among providers' attitudes about parents in relation to their own values.

[8] For typically 50-hour weeks, providers' in Nelson's study earned an average of $7,500 per year, well below Vermont's average wage for women. Providers were somewhat more educated that Vermont women on average: 94% had completed high school, half had completed some college, 24% graduated from 4-years of college or had graduate coursework. Like other child care workers across the country, they were accurate in feeling that they were underpaid.

CONCLUSION

The New American Family

Fundamental changes have reshaped American family life over the last two centuries. Previously, extended families usually lived on the land they farmed and functioned as self-sufficient units, each producing the basic necessities required for their own survival. Life centered around the home and family, or more precisely, the homestead, the extended family, and sometimes unrelated kith or servants. The labors of every man, women, and child were integral to the unit's economic production.

Parents Working Outside the Home

During the nineteenth century, the changes brought by the Industrial Revolution led an ever-increasing number of men in the United States to join the paid workforce — in the 50 years from 1790 to 1840, the number of Americans living in cities climbed from 1 million to 11 million (Zinn, 1980). Families moved away from their farms to cities where they could be close to factories and commerce. Unmarried women took jobs outside the home in increasing numbers during this period, as did children.

During the first century of industrialization and urbanization, married women usually stayed at home to tend to the housework and child care. By 1890, only 5% of married women worked outside the home. Their domestic labor contributed to the family's well-being while others' earnings enabled them to purchase goods and services. Most married women who worked for pay were poor, and also immigrants, women of color, or widows (Blau & Ferber, 1986; Polakow, 1992; Safa, 1986).

Children, especially poor and immigrant children, labored in factories as well. In 1880, one out of every six children under sixteen in the United States, 1,118,000 children, were in the paid workforce. By 1900, there were 284,000 children between the ages of ten and fifteen in mines, mills, and factories. (Zinn, 1980)

During the twentieth century, gradually increasing numbers of married women took jobs outside the home. The first married women in the paid workforce tended to be those who did not have children or whose children were old enough to be relatively independent. In the last 50 years, the number of mothers of young children working outside the home has increased, with mothers of infants experiencing dramatic increases during the last 20 years.

Increasing numbers of women working outside the home gradually depleted the availability of other female relatives to care for the children of working mothers. In the decade of the nineties, a majority of mothers with infants hold paid jobs, most of them full-time. A majority of families with working mothers pay non-relatives to care for their young children at least part-time and often for half their waking hours. (O'Connell & Bachu, 1992)

The economic and cultural forces that have driven these changes include the devaluation of traditional women's work and of children's experience. These forces are embedded in a culture of consumerism where commodities that can be seen are valued more than services that do not produce tangible results. The increased disparity in wealth between the upper- and lower-classes in the United States has exacerbated the hardship of lower-income families (Wilson, 1987).

The activity of caring for children — at the heart of traditional women's work and therefore never well-respected — has been further devalued during the last century as a majority of mothers have found more compelling uses for their time, energy, and talents. We as a culture are coming to believe that it is more important for a mother to contribute to her family through paid work than through homemaker roles. The idea that paid work is the most worthy use of mothers' time, regardless of economic need, is gaining wide acceptance.

Today's fathers are culturally supported for abdicating any responsibility for their children's care. Most fathers are amazingly disinterested in the quality of experience of their own children. Mother responsibilities for children, in most families, have remained unchanged regardless of the number of hours they work outside the home.

Changes in the Experience of Early Childhood

The experience of being a child has been transformed during the last two centuries, most radically in the last few decades. Time children used to spend in productive labor, on farms or in factories, has been replaced by time spent in school and child care. Increasing numbers of our nation's young children spend much of their most formative years in child care: children under age five whose mothers are employed spend an *average* of 30 hours per week in child care while their mothers work; the number of hours are almost identical for infants and toddlers as for preschoolers (O'Connell & Bachu, 1992).

The years children spend in child care compose a critical period for gaining a basic sense of whether or not they as people are worthy of others' attention, affection, and trust, and whether they can expect their needs to be met. Children during their first few years also gain a basic sense of whether or not they are competent people able to act effectively, make good decisions, and exert influence. These basic predispositions are notoriously difficult to remediate later in life. No doubt it is cost-effective to get it right the first time. When children spend a large proportion of their early years in child care, they need caregivers who are responsive to them and their needs and help them learn to get along with others. Optimal development also requires an interesting environment with stimulating activities.

But many children are warehoused in child care programs that are stagnating or harmful to their development, designed to keep costs low rather than to meet children's needs. Their busy and often highly stressed parents lack the time, emotional energy, and knowledge to worry about the quality of care their children receive.

The needs of individual children are overlooked as child care on the cheap is commodified to take advantage of economies of scale. Few people notice the damage being done as children are herded from one age-inappropriate activity to another, contained in cribs, or wandering around with nothing to do. The quality of childhood is overlooked as children are "relegated to an existence which does not impose upon the productivity of adults." (Polakow [Suransky], 1982/1992, pp. 188-189) The future of our next generation of families, the competence of our labor force, and indeed the quality of life in this nation is being shaped by early care and education today. Our young children and their families deserve better.

Child Care, an Occupation in Trouble

The quality of early care and education is directly determined by the quality of its workforce. This quality appears to be decreasing, now when we need it more than ever. Two decades ago, work with young children was seen as an attractive job by many women. Supported by the idealism of the time, the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of young children drew competent women into child care, which felt like appropriate and familiar work. Pre-feminist values and a relatively low divorce rate allowed many of these women to be content in depending upon their husband's salaries to support their families. But we are seeing a graying of this workforce. Over the last two decades, women's career options have expanded considerably, and child care is not seen as an attractive job by today's young workers. Hiring standards have been lowered to accommodate the quality of workers that will take low-paid, low-status work.

The "good" child care workers interviewed for this study showed strong satisfaction with the content of their work and strong dissatisfaction with its extremely low pay and low social status. Society and even the parents whose lives these women "make work" dismiss caregivers as "babysitters." Caregivers despise this minimization and trivialization of their critically important work. Two interviewees in this study noted the feminist irony in the fact that they were being left behind, in every way, by other women. This most traditional of women's work has been fundamentally devalued as even mothers leave it behind. As they go off to work in the wider world, they gain the perks that have usually accrued only to men and are still unavailable to child care workers.

As caregivers compare their jobs to those of other workers, they conclude that child care is not a "real job" or "real career." In addition to the poor compensation and invisibility awarded to their work, the field offers "dead-end jobs" with few opportunities for career development — experience and training bring little or no increase in pay or responsibility. The extremely high turnover rate in child care means that, at an age when healthy development demands continuity in relationships, many young children are cared for by a series of caregivers.

Thus, the future well-being of our nation is in the hands of workers who are situated at the bottom of the occupational status and pay hierarchy. While several causes of this paradox have been proposed by this study, it remains fundamentally difficult to understand why this situation is tolerated and perpetuated by parents or the nation at large.

The very real inability of lower-income parents to pay today's child care fees, combined with the lack of awareness on the part of upper-income parents about the value of high-quality care, have resulted in a system of early care and education that is grossly underfunded. Taking care of very young children is an extremely labor-intensive activity requiring responsibility and skill. We have not begun to recognize the true market cost of this labor.

Insufficient funding jeopardizes quality in several ways. It forces programs to assign many children to each caregiver and to minimize job qualifications so as to find enough workers who will work for minimal wages and benefits. It forces programs to skimp on toys, materials, and equipment, and to otherwise shortchange the quality of care. And as we have seen, the resulting high turnover is particularly harmful to very young children who need stable, consistent relationships to support healthy development.

Today's caregivers continue to subsidize and thereby support and sustain the situation through their low wages and long hours — they are only half way removed from unpaid women's work. Who will replace the generation of child care workers from a range of social classes who chose their career when socially meaningful work was more valued and women did not have so many career options? What will happen when the economy improves and more child care workers are needed?

The toleration of unsatisfactory early care and education by caregivers and parents alike is parallel to our toleration of the unsatisfactory quality of family life in this country. Many parents are caught on a treadmill of long work hours to support high levels of consumerism. Do parents realize that most of them could cut back on their consumption — scale down their housing, household accoutrements, cars, clothing, vacations, or entertainment — and work fewer hours so as to have more time for their families and more time for involvement in their children's child care? Such short-term sacrifice would be rewarded in the long term.

Time has become money in this busy culture and relationships have become commodified. We would be well-advised to reassess the value of time, of play, of relationships, and of childhood experience itself. Each of these concepts involves investment, the value of which should be re-examined. Central to this rethinking will be the re-evaluation of the components of traditional women's work.

Reclaiming Women's Ways of Caring

The pendulum has swung in our culture today toward male values. They dominate not only the workplace but also the home and family. The workplaces that women join may not reflect their values:

> After nearly two decades of flux and frustration, women finally have made their way into the cold, calculating business world, where birthday cakes and other such caring ways always have been shunned. Now, according to a growing number of social observers and spokeswomen in the business world, today's working women are realizing that it's hard, if not impossible, to take up the traditional male role of doing business where cold reality always wins over feelings.
>
> Long work hours, relentless competition, and an aggressive, dictatorial style go against their nurturing, listening nature, women complain.
>
> (Mathias, 1989, p.D5)

Things may be just as bad at home. Today's families suffer from the absence of nurturance that traditional women's work used to provide to all family members. In this post-industrial society we have not yet learned how to replicate the important functions performed by pre-industrial women. As working women and men joke about how they wish they had a housewife at home, they mean it. Traditional women's work is nurturing and health-sustaining to those who benefit from it. Wouldn't we all like to have nice meals prepared, the housecleaning and laundry done, the children reliably cared for?

Our culture needs more compassion, altruism, empathy, caring for caring's sake. We want the "women's work" to get done, but few people today want to do it. Why not? Because it is absolutely devalued. It is tedious. It is quickly consumed so there is nothing to show for one's labors. And it consumes a lot of precious time. Who will carry out these physical and emotional chores? Women will not give up the perks of their careers to return to housework. Yet there is a yearning among today's women and some men to reclaim caring and intimacy with others, especially family members (Bateson, 1990; Gilligan, 1982, 1986; Miller, 1976). The well-being of our families and indeed our society depends upon our devising new ways to fulfill the functions of traditional women's work.

Contrary to the cultural trend, good child care workers are in the business of delivering these needed services. The interviews of this study show that they take great pleasure in developing their relationships with children, making a nice environment for them, supporting their growth and learning. One director who had started her own child care center mused:

> I created this center to be a little world where people really care about each other. Everybody gets along together — staff, children, and parents alike. You know if you have a problem everyone will pitch in to help you solve it. We support each other. Kids and adults can count on getting their needs met. The rest of the world isn't always like that. I love living my days in such a nurturing place.

Good family child care providers often feel that they are at the center of nurturing little worlds of their own creation. Clearly such work is highly satisfying to some women as well as beneficial to those who enter their domestic microcosms.

We need these people. They deserve to be supported for doing their important jobs. They should not be forced to submit to poverty and social devaluation in order to work with young children.

The Clinton Era has just begun. People are talking again about investing in children. The next few years may bring the opportunity for significant social change in early care and education. Just as the problems identified in this study originate simultaneously from the macro-levels of culture and economics and the micro-levels of individual families, child care programs, and employers — so also change is needed in cultural values and public policy as well as at the individual level. The following recommendations identify directions for public policy and strategies for the two primary advocacy constituencies, parents and early childhood professionals.

Recommendations

Directions for Public Policy

Market forces have produced satisfactory substitutes for some of the services that used to be family-produced, such as food and clothing. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for child care. The rapidly increasing demand for child care services, accompanied by a lack of planning or oversight and grossly insufficient funding have resulted in a chaotic and inadequate system of child care. Market forces will never fix these problems. Any satisfactory solution will require national policy leadership and support.

Our nation's record on early care and education stands in distinct contrast to that of other industrialized countries, where national governments have taken the lead to ensure that children of working parents receive a quality of care that supports their development and well-being.

A National System for Early Care and Education. The goal of public policy should be to assure that every child in America has access to good-quality early care and education, which parents can afford and can depend upon for their full working day. Accordingly, good child care should be an *entitlement* for every child in the United States.

Program standards, guidance and training, and effective monitoring should be assured through federal legislation. Individual programs should have the autonomy to determine how they will carry out the well-defined standards, thereby promoting program diversity, worker commitment, and services which match the individual needs of children, parents, and caregivers.

Financing. A national system of child care entitlement will be expensive, about as expensive as public school for older children. When we gain the national will to develop such a system, we who are still the richest nation in the world will be able to figure out how to pay for it, as have other industrialized countries.

It could be funded in either of two ways. The public sector could pay the full costs through corporate and individual taxes, as it does for public schools, law enforcement, and defense. Or it could be financed by parents paying what they can afford on a sliding-scale basis with government paying the rest. One model of this approach is now practiced in the progressive state of Minnesota: very poor families are entirely subsidized by the state; families earning up to 110% of the county's median income receive a sliding-scale subsidy based on adjusted income; and families earning above 110% of the median income pay the entire cost. (Originally, some counties paid subsidies for families up to 125% of median income) Of course if such subsidies are an entitlement, there can be no waiting lists for available slots as there are for subsidized child care today.

Either approach to funding will require major new tax dollars, some of which can undoubtedly be gleaned from cuts in spending. The remainder will require that employers and individuals pay higher taxes. Without increasing the deficit, this will involve sacrifice through reduced consumer spending and business profits. A system of free public child care for all our nation's children would cost substantially more than a sliding-scale approach, but it would gain the political support of middle- and upper-income parents — probably a political necessity.

Such a national investment will pay off later as children enter public school eager to learn and interested in getting along with others. The return on this investment will continue in the future as children who got off to a good start eventually become the parents, workers, and citizens of tomorrow. Put another way, it will not be as costly to pay for a comprehensive national child care system as it will be to endure or remediate the pervasive problems that will be caused if we passively accept today's inadequate system. As a church billboard suggested, we would be well advised to "prepare and prevent, not repair and repent."

Affordability. Paying for child care is currently left to each family, "every tub on its own bottom." This is fine for rich families; it causes great hardship in poor families. It creates a two-class system in which poorer children — who benefit most from good child care — get lower quality care. This injustice is a fundamental violation of our nation's democratic principles. At the very least, public policy must ensure that low-income children get subsidized child care that is available full-day and full-year so their parents can work.

The point at which parents can afford to pay the full cost of good-quality care might reasonably be set at 125% of median income. Above that parents could afford to pay the full cost, though their political resistance might overcome any such proposal.

Compensation. The income of child care workers and their fringe benefits should be increased dramatically to compensate them for their full cost of care at levels equivalent to those of other workers with comparable qualifications and responsibilities.

We must decouple what parents can afford to pay from what caregivers are paid. The U.S. Army has developed an effective model of this approach: parents on military bases are charged fees on a sliding scale depending on their adjusted income; caregivers are paid on a salary scale that rewards increased training and experience; the Army pays the difference. (Ironically, this together with high-quality training makes the Army *the* national leader in employer-sponsored child care. If such expenditures are deemed worthy by this branch of our government, why not others? If this branch of our government mandates that such expenditures should be made by this employer, why not others?)

Training, Certification, and Regulation. Every indication suggests that caregivers improve the quality of their care when they participate in good training. Children's development is enhanced in a myriad of ways. Assuming that the early years lay the foundation for a lifetime, public policy supporting good child care training should become a national resource.

To support good quality, head teachers and directors in centers should hold at least a Bachelor's degree in a child-related field. Certification indicating such training should be required for these positions.

Ongoing training should be required through regulation for family child care providers and assistants in centers, as well as certified caregivers. Training options should include advanced as well as beginning-level courses, not just one-time workshops. Training should reflect the principles of adult education while it helps caregivers construct their own knowledge based on sound information, rather than making them the passive recipients of information which they may reject or forget. Directors and providers also need effective training in business management. Beginning-level training for family child care providers should be offered separately from training for center teachers or directors because appropriate content for the two settings is surprisingly different; advanced classes in areas such as infant-toddler development or working with parents can be relevant to caregivers from a range of settings but instructors must be knowledgeable about the differences among settings. State training registries should be developed to document the credits earned for good-quality ongoing training.

Caregiver wages must increase when they attain relevant education and training. Training should be subsidized until child care incomes rise enough so that caregivers can afford to pay for their own education.

Minimal levels of child care regulation should be mandated by federal law to guarantee a floor of quality for all our children, including program standards as well as health and safety. Effective monitoring of compliance with regulation must also be an entitlement.

Parental Leave. Both mothers and fathers should have partially or fully paid leave from their jobs for at least four months after the birth of adoption of a child. AFDC should be available for single parents who choose to stay home with children under age two unless high-quality child care is accessible.

Early Childhood Professionals

Those who work with young children must become more conscious of the causes of poor quality child care as a first step to becoming effective advocates. They must come to believe that they as well as children and families deserve more, and they must come to understand that the financing could be found through shifts in individual and governmental priorities. Finally, they must take active responsibility for changing the prevailing practices and they must stop enabling our dysfunctional system to continue through their passive compliance.

The Worthy Wage Campaign. How can we help child care workers and parents examine what they take for granted, "to animate certain constructs with their indignation, so that they can see them as sources of the injustice that plagues them, see them, not as givens, but as constituted by human beings and changeable by human beings?" (Greene, 1978, p. 223) The Worthy Wage Campaign is one critical strategy — see for example, Morin (1989) and Windflower Enterprises (1992). This movement is proving to be an effective vehicle to help caregivers examine the situation critically. It needs to be joined by parents and others who care about young children, and carried to employers and the general public.

Professionalism. As the occupation of early care and education continues to professionalize, we must gain recognition for the specialized knowledge and skill of well-trained child care workers, and recognize their work as worthy of increased funding. Career mobility must be greatly expanded through such programs as master teachers and mentorships, for both center and home caregivers. At the same time, we must guard against pressure to become more formal, rigid, and impersonal — informality and friendliness are essential qualities in child care (Silin, 1988).

Parents

Parents are the missing link in the constituency that must be built to improve the quality of child care. There is no effective national organization of parents who care about child care. Parents are notoriously difficult to organize. Not only are they terribly busy, they are not aware of the problems, and they are defended against seeing them, as described in Chapter 8. Around the time they really grasp what goes on in child care, how very problematic it has been for themselves and their children, their children move on to school.

If child care is to gain the political support necessary to improve it, parents will have to overcome the barriers of time, lack of awareness, and anxiety.

Families would also benefit from putting more energy into being a family together — eating meals together, doing household activities together — creating a nurturing home, taking care of each other.

Parent Choice. Parents should be able to choose their child's care from among a variety of good-quality, full-day, affordable programs, so they can select one that is in harmony with their cultural and personal values. Congruity with parental values is particularly important in programs for the youngest children.

Young children need more than parking or kenneling. Their parents need to learn how to choose child care that supports and facilitates their development. Public policy is needed to support consumer education to help parents gain the self-confidence and knowledge to make them informed consumers of child care.

Employers

If employers are to benefit from the labor of both mothers and fathers, they should assume some of the cost of their children's care. This study argues that employers are not well-suited to the business of supplying what children need. Instead, employers should contribute financial support through corporate taxes.

Employers should also become much more family friendly. Why is it that parents find it easier to tell their supervisors that they were delayed by car trouble than to admit that they had a problem with their child care? Parents, both fathers and mothers, should be encouraged to take time off from work to stay home with their children when they are sick and to attend events at their children's child care and schools. Employees should be free to leave work when they are scheduled to be with their families.

A National Alliance for Early Care and Education

This study concludes that a satisfactory system of early care and education will become politically viable if and only if parents — fathers as well as mothers — and child care professionals join together to demand it. Early childhood professionals advocating these improvements are often seen as promoting their own self interest and their numbers are too small to form an effective power base. As seen in Chapter 8, parents and caregivers must understand and overcome the significant tensions between them before they will be able to build an effective alliance.

Parents, child care workers, and other caring citizens must shoulder the responsibility and muster the energy and commitment to carry out the effort required. Only when we join forces in a major national drive will we have political influence sufficient to change public opinion. Ideally, the administration and congress will lead the way. The time has come.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

REVIEW OF RESEARCH

CHILD CARE AS AN OCCUPATION

The knowledge base of child care as an occupation is as precarious as its financial base and political base. In the last two decades we have developed a fairly firm foundation of knowledge about child care itself, but the workers have usually remained behind the scenes. Following are findings from studies large and small that expand on the background for this study described in Chapter 1.

The Shortage of Child Care Workers

The shortage of child care workers has been demonstrated by several studies (Whitebook, 1986; Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989; Willer, 1988). The supply of well-trained caregivers and those who want to care for infants is particularly inadequate, although the current unemployment level has temporarily reduced this problem in some communities.

One child care center director dramatized the reality behind the statistics about the shortage of child care workers:

> There's not a lot of people applying for jobs now. There were times when I would put an ad in the paper and the phone would ring 100 times during the day. It depends on the economy. There were not a lot of job choices then. Now people can work at McDonalds and get benefits and get a free hamburger, and get the same wage as in child care. Now program directors put ads in the papers and nobody calls.
>
> When my child care program was started in 1971, it was a time when altruism was common. There were a lot of people around who were interested in making a contribution to society, making the world a better place, improving the lives of others, looking outside of themselves.
>
> People now are into "me." We give more energy, in our society now, to material goods and status consciousness. People now work for income, not to make the world a better place. Child care is not valued in our society--not yet. (Modigliani, 1986, pp. 48-49)

Agencies attempting to recruit family child care providers — the most common source of care for infants and toddlers — report a similar shortage of new providers. Community child care needs assessments often identify a lack of infant care, and thus family child care, as the greatest shortage.

Even when jobs are plentiful, qualified applicants are scarce. Few college students major in early childhood education for the same reasons cited for public school teachers:

> You cannot attract a sizable number of talented college graduates to an occupation that features low wages, questionable working conditions, [and] declining occupational prestige. . . . (Sykes, 1983, p. 93).

Each of these employment factors — wages, working conditions, and prestige — is particularly problematic in child care.

Turnover

Child care has one of the highest turnover rates of all occupations. Following are the ten occupations which have the highest turnover rates according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (1986, p.18):

1. *Child care workers in private households (in child's home)*
2. News vendors
3. Food counter, fountain, and related occupations
4. Waiters and waitresses' assistants
5. Attendants at amusement and recreation facilities
6. Street and door-to-door sales workers
7. Garage and service station related occupations
8. Helpers in construction trades
9. *Child care workers not in private households*
   (In provider's home or child care center)
10. Information clerks

These ten occupations share the common characteristics of low wages and status. But child care is unlike the others in that it requires more responsibility and skill and the ability to establish relationships with clients.

The California Retention Study (Lawrence, Brown, & Bellm, 1989) tracked turnover of family child care providers who had been recruited and supported by the California Child Care Initiative. The most significant cause of turnover among those who had stopped caring for children, beside relocation, was inadequate or unstable income. Those who stayed in business were more likely to be married and depend upon a spouse's income.

The high turnover rates jeopardize quality. Children and their parents are hurt when they lose caregivers whom they have come to trust and sometimes love. Difficulty in hiring adds to the stress of the remaining staff, as well as the children and their parents. Directors must neglect other important tasks to attend to recruiting and hiring new workers, who must then be oriented and often trained on the job. Sometimes the programs operate with reduced staff, often in violation of state regulations, further compromising the quality of care. And in some communities it is nearly impossible to find substitute caregivers.

It should be noted that research on child care center turnover must be analyzed with caution, because there seems to be a discrepancy between turnover rates as reported by directors and length of time on the job as reported by teachers or other data sources. For instance, in Washtenaw County, Michigan, fewer than one-third of all directors reported any turnover in teaching positions during the previous year. But a majority of staff members in those same centers report being on their jobs for two years or less. (It was impossible to interpret this finding from the data.)

Similarly, the National Day Care Study reported that 40% of all centers had no turnover in the last year, and 32% more had a turnover rate of 20% or less. Contrast these with the extremely high turnover rate for child care workers according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. These figures do not add up. It seems that there are major validity problems in some turnover data. I trust the teachers' reports of how long they have been on the job more than the directors' recall. It seems that the inaccuracy of the directors' statistics are produced in part by recall error — they forget about some of the teachers who left during the past year — and in part by wishful thinking

The Consequences of High Turnover and Inadequate Supply

Barbara Willer (1988) of the National Association for the Education of Young Children has documented the problems resulting from the shortage of child care workers:

- Staff turnover in child care is twice as high as average in other jobs. This is of particular concern because children need consistent relationships they can count on to develop the long-term ability to form lasting emotional attachments to others, and parents need consistent relationships with caregivers to build trust and communication. Further, high turnover adds to the costs of recruitment and training.
- The teacher shortage causes a lack of qualified applicants for teaching jobs, resulting in unqualified staff being hired, and the number of children per adult being increased (research has shown that both of these factors are significantly related to quality of care).
- Unreliable child care causes working parents' decreased job productivity and increased absenteeism and stress.

Clearly, we must learn how to reduce turnover to improve the quality of child care.

Caregiver Training and Quality

Research findings show consensus that both specialized education in child development and early education and total amount of education are correlated with quality of child care (Arnett, 1987; Divine-Hawkins, 1981; Erheart & Leavitt, 1986; Howes, 1986; Kontos, 1992; Phillips, 1986; Whitebook et al., 1989).

The stereotype is that early childhood teachers are not well educated. In fact, child care workers possess somewhat more education than the average worker (Willer et al., 1991). The National Day Care Study (Coelen, Glantz, and Calore, 1979) found in its national sample of full-year child care centers that 43% of head teachers had a BS/BA or beyond, as did 62% of directors. Almost half of all caregivers including aides had 2-year college degrees, and 29% had four or more years of college — twice the average of working women in all occupations (pp. 136-137). The Demand and Supply Study (Willer et al., 1991) found that 47% of teachers had 4-year college degrees, and 13% 2-year degrees. Only 14% had no formal training beyond high school. Among providers, 64% of those regulated and 34% of those nonregulated had some special child care or early education training. Education levels vary greatly depending on the community, according to a comparison of several small community surveys of child care employees.[1]

College professors and instructors report declining enrollments in early childhood education because of the low salaries in the field. Some of these professors question whether they can in good conscience encourage college students to go into this kind of work. Several have admitted that they try to persuade students interested in early childhood education to redirect their interest to elementary school teaching.

Some of these professors even wonder whether we should give up the idea of an educated workforce in child care. They do not believe professional-level salaries for child care workers will ever be possible.

It should be noted that a balance of trained and untrained caregivers working together can do a fine job, both in center- and home-based care. A team composed of a paraprofessional working with a well-educated supervisor can provide informed, developmentally appropriate care at a reasonable cost.

The Income of Child Care Workers

See Chapter 1 for an introduction to this topic. Surveys at the national, regional, and state levels add documentation to the inadequate salaries paid to child care professionals.

The National Child Care Staffing Study. Marcy Whitebook, Carollee Howes, and Deborah Phillips (1989) examined quality and compensation in child care centers in five cities. They found that the median annual income of teaching staff in 1988 was $9,363 for full-time, full-year work. This was lower than the poverty threshold for a family of three, the average size of the staff members' families. Fifty-seven percent of all center staff members earned $5.00 per hour or less. Wages were lowest in the child care chains, and next lowest in the independent for-profits; publicly sponsored programs and centers affiliated with larger organizations such as hospitals or colleges paid higher than average wages. Centers that were part of a larger organizations paid a little more than average, but only $1-2 per hour more ($2,000-4,000 annually).

Compared to the 1977 data for three of the five cities from the National Day Care Study (Roupp, Travers, Glantz, & Coelen, 1979), wages were 27% *lower* for teachers and 20% lower for assistants, adjusting for inflation. Many center staff work less than full-time and less than full-year, reducing income even further.

Although these wages were extremely low, 42% of teaching staff earned at least half of their household income. Not surprisingly, 25% worked a second job (compared to only 7% in 1977).

There is little financial incentive for staff to work their way up the career ladder — more accurately "career step-stool" — of child care (Modigliani, 1989a). Pay increases for higher level jobs are very little; only 8% of administrative directors earned over $15,000 per year (Whitebook et al., 1989).

Finally, center-based wages are usually quite "flat." Outside unionized programs, teachers rarely receive step raises or other pay for longevity.

Bureaus of the Census and Labor Statistics Data. The main government statistics on average income of detailed occupations comes from the 10-year Census. The last available income-by-occupation data, in *Census of Population, 1980* (1984), show that mean hourly earnings for 1979 were:

	men	women
Drywall Installers	$7.59	$6.05
Carpet Installers	7.12	4.83
Animal Caretakers	5.09	3.60
Parking Lot Attendants	4.64	3.86
Child Care Workers*	4.55	3.13
Child Care Workers**	3.92	2.17

* Except Private Household ** Private Household

The category "Child Care Worker, Except Private Household" includes family child care providers (contrary to popular belief — private households are defined as the employ*er*'s household) as well as any child care center staff members that do not identify themselves specifically as teachers. Rendering it a nearly meaningless category, it also includes foster parents, foster grandparents, and school lunchroom and playground attendants. (This categorization system has been significantly improved for the 1990 Census, so the first meaningful federal statistics about family child care workers will soon be available.) Child Care Workers, Private Household, include only those in the child's home. The new category, Family Child Care Provider, includes only providers. Unfortunately, data for child care center teachers are reported with a hodgepodge of other miscellaneous occupations that work with children. The category Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers mixes public school and preschool teachers together.

Data for the child care occupations in 1987 showed that full-time Child Care Workers, Except Private Household, earned an average of $191 per week, Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers earned $332 per week, and Private Household Child Care Workers earned $94 per week. Elementary Teachers earned $462 per week (U. S. Department of Labor, 1988).

Child care is one of the two lowest-paid occupations in the United States of the 503 occupations categorized by the Census Bureau (National Committee on Pay Equity, 1987). The researchers, adjusting for number of years of education and work experience, concluded that the lowest-paid U. S. occupation is the clergy. Next are child care workers, including those in family child care and centers. If these researchers had been able to control for non-wage compensation, such as the housing and car allowances received by many clergy, I believe they would have found that child care workers have the unfortunate distinction of being the very most low-paid of all our nation's workers, given their experience and education.

We do not have good national data on the incomes of family child care providers (Kontos, 1992), although a study now under way at Wheelock College, the Economics of Family Child Care, will yield comprehensive information on this topic. The Census has not previously recognized this occupation, though they have now added "family child care providers" as a separate category, and their new income data should be available in 1993. No one has yet measured family child care costs in any comprehensive way, though the Wheelock College study will supply this information. Most research has focused on regulated care, only 10-20% of all family child care.

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association Study. Dave Riley and Kathleen Rodgers conducted a first-rate study of Wisconsin licensed family child care and center-based staff (1989). They found that more than half of family child care providers could not report their gross incomes. Of those reporting, the median gross income for 1987 was $12,000, with a range of $1,300 to $25,000. Expenses averaged $6,883 and ranged from $431 to $18,500[2]. Estimated net income averaged $5,319, and ranged from negative $4,700 to $15,000. The average pro-rated wage was $2.37 per hour; the top tenth percentile was $3.95 per hour. The average work week was 61 hours. These licensed or regulated family child care providers probably make higher incomes than the less business-oriented unlicensed providers.

More than half of all teachers and head teachers made $5.00 or less ($10,00 per year, a poverty-level wage), and more than half of all assistants were paid $4.00 or less. Child care workers' salaries were comparable to those of fast food workers, motel laundry workers, and cannery workers. They earned considerably less than janitors, messengers, or nurses' aids. One in five full-time workers also held a second paid job. Alarmingly, they also documented an actual decline in teachers' salaries from 1980 to 1988. Controlling for inflation, teachers were actually paid 32 cents less per hour than they were eight years earlier.

Higher wages for center staff correlated with number of years on the job and years of education, but neither of these qualifications resulted in higher incomes for providers.

The National Day Care Home Study. There is every reason to believe that income in family child care (FCC) is even lower than in center-based care, as shown in the Wisconsin study. The only reliable national study of income that includes unregulated homes (the majority of all FCC homes) was conducted in 1977-78 by the National Day Care Home Study. At that time, the average income of urban FCC providers was about half of minimum wage, and less than half the income of urban center workers at that time (Coelen et al., 1979). Only 6% of providers earned enough to put them above the federal poverty line; only 1% earned more than the low-income cutoff set by the Department of Labor (Singer, Fosburg, Goodson, & Smith, 1980). Interestingly, 60% of the parents surveyed in this study said they would be willing to pay more for their child care (Divine-Hawkins, 1981).

The Public Schools Early Childhood Study. In the Bank Street-Wellesley study of early childhood programs in 1600 school districts across the country, we found that the same patterns exist in the public schools, to a lesser degree (Mitchell, Seligson, & Marx, 1989). Even though 93% of all public school prekindergarten teachers, across all program types in the Public School Early Childhood Study's District Survey, were school-district employees, only 75% were paid on the same scale as other teachers in their districts. Sometimes when salaries were lower, the education and certification requirements were correspondingly lower than for other district teachers — but sometimes they were comparable or identical. The frequency of differential pay varied significantly by program type. Just over two-thirds of the locally-funded prekindergartens paid standard district salaries, but only about one-third of the parent fee programs and only one-quarter of the subsidized child care programs paid district-level salaries.

On the other hand, while many early childhood teachers are paid less than the other teachers in their districts, they are usually paid more than other early childhood programs in their communities. In general, public schools have correspondingly fewer problems in hiring and keeping qualified staff, compared to other programs in their communities.

Sometimes prekindergarten teachers were satisfied with their pay, even though it was less than the K-12 pay, because they compared themselves with other early childhood teachers rather than the other teachers in their school systems. Early childhood teachers seemed to take their lower salaries for granted; they implied that they did not deserve as much as the teachers in the higher grades, or that equitable pay was simply impossible. (Modigliani, 1989b)

Other Income Studies. Other studies confirm the very low incomes in this field. The average Head Start teacher's salary in 1989 was $11,859 (Collins, 1990). According to a study by the GAO (1989), teachers in centers accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children — high-quality centers that tend to pay higher-than-average salaries — received salaries averaging $13,700 in 1988, less than half the average salary of elementary teachers.

In the Washtenaw County, Michigan survey described in Chapter 1, center staff members earned approximately half the first-year pay of public school teachers with the same levels of education, while most center staff worked 12 months compared to the schools' 10 months. (See the Summary of Findings from that study in Appendix B.) In a study of center workers in New York state excluding New York City, child care teachers received $10,358 and assistants received $8,611; staff secretaries and bookkeepers earn more than head teachers (Marx, Zinsser, & Porter, 1990).

Child care center workers' pay is sometimes decreased when several children are absent, and staff gets sent home; for them the symptom of the annual chicken pox epidemic is a reduced paycheck. Most family child care providers do not get paid when children are absent, even though they are open for business and cannot fill the absent child's space.

Men's Attitudes. As seen in Chapter 1, only 4% of child care workers are men. Is this because of the pay levels? Men have been less satisfied with their teaching jobs than women in most public school studies; male teachers tend to be more unhappy with their salaries than female teachers. Female teachers in public school studies have been especially happy with the way that a teaching schedule can be combined with raising a family (Chapman & Lowther, 1982; Kornbluh & Cooke, no date; Lortie, 1975)[3].

Income and Quality of Care.

Education and Turnover. We have already seen that the low incomes in child care threaten the quality of child care in several way. They attract workers with less education; education level is directly related to quality. High turnover, also strongly affected by wages, reduces quality.

Ratios and Group Size. Good ratios of adults to children and small group size are two variables are consistently related to higher quality. But programs are pressed to hire as few staff as possible to keep costs down. Homes and centers are pressed to accept as many children as legally allowed, or as many as they can manage, so they can make a sufficient income.

Hours. Family child care providers typically work 55-65 hours per week, in spite of their low incomes, because they must to meet parents' needs. Center directors and teachers also tend to work many hours of unpaid overtime, especially those with high levels of responsibility (Modigliani et al., 1985; Whitebook et al., 1982).

Fringe Benefits

The National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook et al., 1989) found that full-time center-based staff in five cities received:

Health insurance	42%
Paid vacation	76%
Paid holidays	77%
Paid sick days	67%
Paid retirement pension	22%
Reduced-fee child care	60%

These figures are high compared to other studies. It could be that workers in predominantly urban areas, the focus of the NCCSS are more likely to earn benefits, or that there has been substantial progress in center staff benefit coverage in recent years.

The Michigan survey found that, although 43% of staff members were covered by health insurance, only 14% were fully paid. Fewer than one-third of the centers paid any vacation benefits. Very few had any kind of pension or retirement benefits (Modigliani et al., 1985)

Unionized centers were much more likely to offer all forms of benefits. For-profit centers were least likely to offer any benefits except reduced-fee child care, which they were most likely to offer. This benefit has little cost to the employer if there are vacancies in the center; it is much more costly if a full-fee-paying slot is sacrificed.

Benefits levels for the Wisconsin center workers included 51% partially or fully paid health insurance and 60% paid sick days. Benefits were virtually nonexistent for Wisconsin family child care providers (Riley & Rodgers, 1989).

A 1984 survey of the members of the National Association for the Education of Young Children showed that a majority of respondents had none of these fringe benefits except paid holidays, which were not analyzed (Willer, 1988). It is presumed that this sample is skewed toward employees in higher-level jobs.

Most family child care providers, judging by informal sources of information, probably do not have even the most basic medical insurance unless they are covered by their spouses' policies, or unless they are among the fraction of providers who can afford to purchase their own health insurance. The same is true for retirement savings or pensions. Most providers do not charge for paid holidays, vacations, or sick days. Nelson (1990) found that Vermont providers seldom took time off if they were sick. A quarter took no vacation time time in the previous year; of those who had vacations, half took one week or less. In sum, fringe benefits in family child care are virtually nonexistent.

Parents' Fees and Government Reimbursement Rates

A few studies have examined parent fees and reimbursement rates. Unfortunately, some of these have used inadequate methodology, failing to control for the number of hours children were in care.

Based on the National Day Care Study findings, Roupp and Travers (1982) identified three important aspects of child care which are traded off against each other:

1) the cost of care to consumers (parents, government);

2) the quality of care; and

3) the wages paid to caregivers.

These trade-offs have come to be known as the child care trilemma. Gwen Morgan has noted that the trilemma is like a three-legged stool — if any side gets a disproportionate amount of the resources, it throws the whole out of balance. Solutions to the wage problem should not sacrifice quality or raise costs beyond the ability of the consumer to pay.

Job Stress and Burnout

Job stress, and a particular stress syndrome which has come to be known as "burnout," are also sources of child care worker dissatisfaction.

Stress and Workload. Mattingly (1977) identified several sources of stress in center teachers. They deeply resented being seen as baby-sitters (as do family child care providers). The constant lack of predictability inherent in working with young children is difficult for those who like to feel that everything is under control; a teacher can never know for sure what will happen at any given moment because young children's interests and emotions shift quickly.

Caregivers may feel grief and depression when children leave, especially if the program is structured so that all the children leave at the same time (Hyson, 1982). As seen in Chapter 1, this may be especially painful for family child care providers who spend a great deal of time with a few very young children, often for several years. They feel almost like the children's mothers, and may feel hurt and loss when children drop out of their lives (Nelson, 1990).

Caregivers may also experience stress due to ethical dilemmas, such as what to do when parents are abusive, neglectful, or otherwise unsatisfactory in their parenting, or what to do when supervisors or parents ask something of the caregiver that is perceived to violate the best interest of the child (Feeney & Sysko, 1986) One-third of Kornbluh & Cooke's teachers (no date) reported that they were required to perform certain job duties that violated their conscience.

Maslach and Pines (1977) studied burnout in child care staff members. They found that poor staff-child ratios, more hours of direct contact with children, and few breaks and few vacations were all associated with burnout. In some centers, teachers did not feel free to take a few moments for themselves when they felt pressure, nor to make suggestions for policy changes, nor to express themselves to their supervisors. These teachers liked their jobs less and rated their programs more negatively than did teachers in centers with more optimal conditions. Such teachers are especially prone to give up during the first couple years of their teaching.

Counteracting Stress. Several factors have been identified which alleviate stress and burnout. Marcy Whitebook found:

> that burn-out is less an intrinsic element of the child care worker's personality or activity than a function of the *context* in which the work itself is performed. By context we include not only the particular structure of a given institution but also the larger social forces — available money, resources and prevailing attitudes toward programs and caretakers that affect institutional policy." (1981, pp. 5-6)

Thus, resources such as breaks and available substitutes are mediators of stress.

Several studies have found that social support alleviates burnout by bolstering the value of teachers' work and their sense of competence (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1979; Maslach & Pines, 1977; Mattingly, 1977). Among the supports mentioned are:

- shared decision making
- clearly articulated goals
- constructive supervision and feedback
- open and frequent communication
- recognition of professional skill

Administrators have a major influence on stress and burnout in all kinds of schools including child care centers. Burnout in schools has been found to be mitigated by administrators who encourage teachers' autonomy, creativity, and voice in decision making, which in turn leads to feelings of personal accomplishment. Social support of colleagues also significantly reduces burnout (Modigliani, 1987).[4]

Commitment is another mediator or antidote for stress and burnout. Joanne Leavitt interviewed five teachers who had demonstrated clear commitment to their jobs. She found that teachers are rejuvenated by their interactions with children —

> facilitating and then observing a child's growth and learning, the thrill of trying a new tactic with an unhappy child and seeing immediate results, developing a sense of trust with the children and their parents, witnessing a child's excitement or surprise at taking on a challenge and succeeding, all are most important contributions to job satisfaction.

Satisfying interactions with others also seem to reduce teacher stress.

Child care workers' jobs can be stressful or not. Some have more children than they can handle, or children with special needs that they cannot meet adequately. Some are bored and alienated by their jobs, even if they are not under intense stress. Teaching is unique not in its degree of stress, but in its particular stresses[5] (Modigliani, 1987).

Child Care Employee Unions

Unions have come to child care in non-public school child care centers in a few progressive communities. The United Auto Workers (UAW) District 65 has organized centers in a few states, including Head Start programs in San Francisco. In Massachusetts, union workers were instrumental in bringing together a broad coalition of concerned advocates who succeeded in getting strong new budgetary support for employee salaries and parent fee subsidies.[6] New York City has a system of publicly-assisted child care centers whose employees belong to AFSCME, as do the workers in many community college centers.

In Denmark, family child care providers are unionized.

> Every two years, the union leaders negotiate with the Council of Municipalities. In 1986, the providers were paid about $236 per month for each child in full-time care. To assure family day care providers a reasonable and predictable income, each municipality had to guarantee that 75% of its providers were paid on the basis of having three full-time children even if they were not in fact caring for that many. Thus, 75% of the family day care providers in a given community could count on receiving at least $708 per month. Providers caring for four children received $944 per month; those caring for five children, $1,180. For perspective on these incomes, compare them with these monthly wages: A Danish minimum wage worker earns $930 ; an untrained child care worker in a center, $1,000; and a trained worker in a center $1,300. (Corsini, 1991, pp. 11)

Anti-Union Forces. But there has been little unionization in child care in the United States. There are many forces at work. A composite of the negatives child care workers express about unionization follows:

> Who would we strike against? Where are the "deep pockets" that could pay for increased wages and benefits? Usually there is no management to strike against. . . . For most caregivers the parent is the employer — parents can't afford to pay more so a strike against parents wouldn't work and wouldn't be right. . . . For center workers there is usually a director and often a board. But they don't have any money, except for some of the for-profits. Often directors are just as overworked and underpaid as anybody.
>
> We need to work together with parents, with directors and boards, and with employers. Only when we all join together can we ensure the best for young children. We can not take an adversarial role with these people. How can we carry out collective bargaining with people who are sometimes almost like family to us? . . .
>
> The for-profit chains would make obvious strike targets. But they would just hire other women who need jobs.
>
> Family child care providers, usually self-employed, have no one to organize against. The few who work for systems could be easily replaced.

Historically, unions have done much more for men than women. Male-dominated members and leaders of many labor unions have not supported equal pay for women, they have "protected" women out of skilled jobs (Hartmann, 1979) and generally reinforced women's second-class place in the labor force.

Comparable Worth Efforts. One of the most effective strategies of unions and other associations is to conduct comparable worth job studies. This approach involves evaluating the wages, responsibilities, and required qualifications for all jobs within an institution. The studies have evaluated child care worker wages in hospitals, colleges, and a few other large institutions. They have consistently found appalling wage discrimination in child care jobs. The state of Washington runs several child care centers and Head Start programs through its community colleges. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and other groups sued the state for wage discrimination against women. The parties settled out of court. Child care employees turned out to be most underpaid of all job classifications in the state. Child care coordinators' salaries were found to be 42.5% below equity, while child care specialists and aides were 37.5% low. Coordinators' monthly paychecks were increased $500 as the first step toward equity.[7]

In other cases, the institutions have restructured the child care jobs rather than paying comparable salaries. Frequently they contract out child care to private groups who do not pay salaries comparable to the institutions'. Or they reduce the requirements of the child care jobs. For example, a job evaluation at one community college found child care teachers classified at Personnel Level 5. If the jobs were to be reclassified to reflect accurately the levels of education and responsibilities required, they would have to be reassigned to Level 10. The pay scale would require that their average salary increase of almost 50%. "No way," said the college administrators, and they eliminated the training requirements. Comparable worth studies have found child care salaries to be about 33%-50% below equity.[8]

Job Satisfaction in Child Care and Other Work

As described in Chapter 1, the Michigan study looked at job satisfactions and dissatisfactions as well as other job attitudes, and compared them to income and other job characteristics. The Summary of Findings of that study is presented in Appendix B.

At first the findings of the Michigan study (summarized in Chapter 1) seemed contradictory. Ninety-five percent of all employees said they liked their jobs; 99% gained personal satisfaction in working with children; 96% liked working with parents (such high satisfaction levels are unusual in survey research). On the other hand, one-quarter of these people were actively looking for another job, and two-thirds of them did not expect to stay in their jobs for the next two years.

The statistics showed that indeed the turnover in these jobs was high. More than half of the teachers and directors had been in their present jobs for three years or less. Only 36% felt their salaries were adequate and only 38% felt their benefits were adequate. Most of those who expected to leave the field within three years mentioned the low salaries, benefits, or status of the field as their main reasons for wanting to leave. Yet many were also staying in their jobs in spite of frustrations, because of their sometimes passionate satisfaction and commitment. They endured their low incomes because they loved their work.

Some researchers have found that a worker's intention to stay in a job or quit is an indicator of job satisfaction. Intention to quit appears to be an especially useful way of tapping the ratio of job dissatisfaction to satisfaction. Actual quitting appears to be a combination of intention to quit, the person's other available job options, and personal characteristics which have not been well defined.[9]

Satisfaction and commitment are the glues which attach a person to a job in spite of its frustrations. Another way of saying the same thing is that they counteract the dissatisfactions that might otherwise lead people to quit jobs. Thus, careful attention to maximizing satisfaction and commitment is one way to make child care work more desirable.

The following analysis of job satisfaction in early childhood workers is drawn from a more complete review (Modigliani, 1987) which summarizes research findings about job satisfaction in early childhood workers, elementary school teachers, and all U. S. workers. The facets of job satisfaction can be classified into three domains:

- the psychological domain (within-the-person variables);
- the social domain (between-people variables); and

- the organizational domain (policy, procedural, and the work itself variables).

In the psychological domain, the most important satisfaction to most child care workers is the pleasure they gain from caring for children and helping them learn. Elementary school teachers most enjoy their sense of accomplishment when they see students learn and develop. Many child care workers get a sense of intellectual challenge and self-actualization from their work. This suggests that their experience is quite different from the general public perception that child care is routine, unskilled labor.

In the social domain, several studies have suggested that for some child care workers, relationships with children, their colleagues, and/or the children's parents are important sources of satisfaction. Jorde-Bloom (1986b, 1988) has identified the importance of a warm, open organizational climate in influencing satisfaction in center teachers. Family child care providers in Wisconsin were most often satisfied when they knew others they could call on to discuss their work (Riley & Rodgers, 1989). The cultural, political, and economic contexts of child care in this country influence the social domain, though they are usually unrecognized by researchers. Exceptions are Margaret Boyer (1986), Jim Morin (1989), Phillip Jackson (1968) and Seymour Sarason (1982). The economic and cultural contexts of child care are addressed in Chapters 5 and 6.

The organizational domain is the main source of dissatisfactions among child care workers. Almost all the causes of the child care worker shortage identified in this chapter fall into the organizational domain: low wages, lack of fringe benefits, stressful working conditions, and lack of opportunity for advancement. It is interesting to note that organizational factors are seldom mentioned as satisfiers.

The following classification of variables related to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction was synthesized from the research findings for all U.S. workers, elementary school teachers, and early childhood teachers (Modigliani, 1987).

Child Care Worker Job Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

Facets of satisfaction are listed in the left column. Some dissatisfactions are simply the opposite of the satisfactions, or the absence of satisfaction — they are not specified. Other dissatisfactions have a unique quality, and are listed in the right column.

SATISFACTIONS	DISSATISFACTIONS
The Psychological Domain	
accomplishment (children learning)	underutilization of skills
self-actualization	frustration at organizational obstacles
efficacy, use of skills and abilities	
mastery of skills	
knowledge, understanding, experiences	
competence, other personal growth	
creativity, innovation	
personal values	
service to others	
commitment	moral alienation/anomie
ethics	guilt and anger about unethical
students	requirements
school	(e.g. over-enrollment)
field	
union	
pride in job well done	
challenge	
decision making	meaninglessness
problem solving	
intellectual interest, optimal stimulation	boredom or role overload
responsibility	

The Social Domain

affiliation, social relationships	social alienation, isolation
children	loneliness
supervisors/administrators	hostility
co-workers	
parents	
collegiality	
support	
fun	
respect and status	
administrators	
society	
family/friends	
power, over	
children	
co-workers	
responsibility for others	
recognition of efforts	sense of invisibility

The Organizational Domain

program autonomy	domination, lack of influence
curriculum, pace, routines, goals	rigid curriculum, tests
interpersonal climate	
warm, supportive atmosphere	stress and "burnout"
effective, open communication	one-way or absence of communication
democratic decision making	authoritarian structure
help and support	
effective feedback	ungrounded criticism
compensation	
salaries, net income/profit	
fringe benefits	
social resources, training, help, support	lack of needed help
clear instructions and expectations	role ambiguity
opportunities for advancement	trapped in dead-end job
job security	fear of loss of job,financial worries
child characteristics	
group size	
age	
special needs	inability to meet children's needs
workload	
hours	
group size/staff ratio	
equity	discrimination
physical resources	
equipment and supplies	
space, comfort, order	

The Cultural Domain

status of child care workers	devaluation of child care as work
valuing of children and parenting	devaluation of children and parentig
valuing of women	devaluation of women
values and beliefs about early education/care	mechanical-technical values

Closely related to the phenomenon of job satisfaction is job commitment. The last analysis run by the Michigan Working Conditions Project before its volunteer effort collapsed was a preliminary analysis of a complex variable of commitment, composed of three variables: expectation of staying in one's center, expectation of staying in early childhood education, and feeling committed to the field. The interrelations of the two are complex, but commitment seems essentially to be a response to job satisfaction.

Commitment

The concept of commitment is important to this study because, among all workers, high job commitment is strongly correlated with low turnover (Farrell and Rusbult, 1981; Mortimer, 1979). Psychologist Eric Klinger, who has studied the phenomenon of commitment, concludes that people become committed to certain goals because they value them and believe that they have a reasonable chance of attaining them. Thus, commitment is predicted by three considerations:

- the *value* of each alternative object or event for a person
- the person's beliefs about his or her *chances* of attaining each such possible goal, and
- the *price* in time, effort, and resources the person believes he or she would have to pay for each one. (Klinger, 1977, p. 304)

If obtaining a goal turns out not to live up to a person's expectations, or to be too inaccessible or too costly, commitment decreases. The incentives lose their value and the person disengages from the commitment. When people become dissatisfied and disappointed with people or institutions, argues Klinger, they become alienated. The natural reaction in such a case is to dissociate oneself from the alienating situation. If a person must remain involved with an alienating situation, frustration, hostility and depression are common responses.

In a critical review of the research about commitment to a job, Paula Morrow (1983) analyzed the various meanings and concepts that are important to people in relation to their work. She identified four basic types: commitment to the work itself, commitment to one's career, commitment to the work organization, and commitment to one's labor union. Klinger's analysis suggests that each individual's values and the attainability of goals will shape the person's work commitments.

Farrell and Rusbult (1981), in a convincing review of related research, found that measures of commitment to the workplace combined with measures of job satisfaction predicted employee turnover more accurately than either commitment or satisfaction alone. Their analysis shows that commitment is related to several aspects of satisfaction, especially salary, prestige, and job variety. They identify the important notion of investments in the particular workplace, such as acquisition of non-portable skills. From this review we might hypothesize that training in early-childhood-related fields is an investment that child care workers make in the field, and established relationships with children, colleagues, and parents are investments they make in their jobs.

It appears that commitment is built from the various aspects of job satisfaction important to each individual. Commitment may be the most important factor in predicting turnover, but the main way that commitment is built is through various aspects of job satisfaction. In general, it seems that if a worker is committed, she will be satisfied, and vice versa.

There has been little research pertaining to child care workers' commitment. The Michigan study explored this new territory. We built a Commitment Index by averaging teachers' and directors' agreement or disagreement with three statements:

"I feel committed to my center."

"I am not looking for another job to improve my salary."

"I am not looking for another job to improve my working conditions."

As discussed in Chapter 1, the following statements are the ones which correlated most strongly with this Commitment Index. Note that lack of commitment is related to disagreement with those statements. (Pearson *r* correlations are shown in parentheses. (All of these correlations are significant at the .0001 level or more.)

I like my present job (.55)

I feel intellectually stimulated in my job (.53)

I like the administrative set-up in my school(.49)

I have a great deal of influence on center policy (.45)

I like my present opportunity for taking responsibility (.44)

I like the flexibility and autonomy of my job (.42)

I like my present work schedule (.39)

I have good communication with the board/owner(.38)

I feel that there is enough support staff at my center(.38)

I have opportunities to progress in salary (.33)

I am informed about what goes on in the center (.31)

In sum, there are many relevant aspects of job satisfaction that are important to child care workers and their career decision-making. What is the range of individual differences in how workers react to similar situations?

Individual Differences in Response to Similar Situations

Because most of the studies cited above used statistics to describe the results of surveys, the emphasis has been on common patterns, not individual differences. But obviously individuals do vary in their responses to similar situations. For example, while approximately two-thirds of the Michigan center-based staff were dissatisfied with their salaries, one-third were satisfied. Who are these people, and why were they satisfied? Is it because money does not mean as much to them, or that they have another source of income, or that their income expectations are low?

Individuals react differently to the same stressors, and workplaces have different stressors. The interaction between individual and environment ("person-environment fit") determines the stress that will actually be experienced. In working with young children, we can imagine that some people would be more distressed than others by crying babies, and that some child care situations have more crying babies than others. A demanding supervisor is highly stress-inducing for some teachers but not as stressful for others.

Conclusion

This review of related research set the stage for the present study. The major points are the following:

1. There is a shortage of child care workers in this country, especially well-qualified workers.
2. The shortage is caused primarily by the occupation's low income and lack of benefits, and secondarily by stressful working conditions, lack of opportunity for advancement, and low status. These are the major dissatisfactions of the occupation.
3. To improve the desirability of child care jobs, workers' dissatisfactions must be reduced and/or their satisfactions and commitment must be increased.

Understanding the lived experience of child care workers — the way they perceive the satisfactions and dissatisfactions of their work — will contribute to planning the changes necessary to reduce the negative and increase the positive aspects of the occupation.

The present study was designed to develop a clear understanding of these issues. It investigates the particular experiences of individual people who are teachers, directors, and providers working in an occupation that is in trouble. Analysis of their stories must include and then transcend the personal and the organizational, to reflect the cultural and political context within which they are grounded. Only then can we understand and appreciate the nuances of the problems as well as the full range of possible solutions to the problems of child care as an occupation.

Notes to Appendix A

[1] For instance, in Washtenaw County, Michigan, home of both the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University, 76% of all child care center teachers and head teachers held bachelor's degrees or beyond, as did 85% of directors (Modigliani et al., 1985), and 70% of all child care staff in San Francisco (Whitebook, 1981). It is also surprising that more than 2 of every 5 center employees in Washtenaw County held elementary teaching certificates. These levels of education go beyond the stereotype of child care workers as babysitters.

Of Riley and Rodgers' Wisconsin center-based workers (1989), 34% had graduated from college in 1980 and in 1988. Only 6% of family child care providers were college graduates in 1980, but by 1988, 20% of providers held college degrees. Is the education level of providers on the rise in other communities? Is the center-staff education stable in other communities? The directors in this study report that the education level of job applicants has fallen in recent years. Fortunately, the Michigan study will soon be replicated, so we will have good longitudinal data on one more community.

Discrepancy between high education and relatively low salaries, low autonomy and social status cause distress. Riley and Rodgers also found the more educated child care center teachers to be less satisfied, and postulated that they were likely to be dissatisfied with their salaries because they had alternatives that "would invariably pay more." (1989, p. 54)

[2] For IRS purposes, providers may count as income a proportion of the costs of remodeling their houses to be more suitable for child care.

[3] Male teachers are also less satisfied with their salaries than the average worker (Kornbluh & Cooke, no date). Lortie (1975) suggests that women are less dissatisfied with their incomes because teaching does pay more than most other work available to women.

[4] These are postulated as moderating variables in the model.

[5] Several findings from the elementary teacher literature may generalize to early childhood teachers. Scrivens et al. (1979), found that many teachers start teaching idealistically, but later come to something akin to a midlife crisis. They feel "used" by the underpaying system and the self-centered children. Pierson (1984) identified three measures of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of feelings of personal accomplishment.

[6] Most of these gains have been eroded in the current recession.

[7] It is important to note that low salaries and status are just as severe a problem for child care administrators as for others in the field. Many directors are highly trained and possess a broad range of skills and many years experience, and yet earn near-poverty wages. Directors have even fewer career-ladder opportunities than do teachers and family day care providers.

8 Most child care centers and homes can not use this approach, because there is no larger institution within which to compare qualifications and responsibilities, or to fund the pay increases. But advocates can use the figures from such studies effectively to demonstrate the low level of child care salaries.

Unfortunately, one danger in forcing institutions to increase child care wages is that they may decide that child care is too expensive, and close their centers instead.

9 We can guess that characteristics such as skills and knowledge, self-confidence, resourcefulness, and perseverance would be correlated with a person's ability to find another job.

Dworkin (1985) points out the worrisome fact that dissatisfied teachers who do *not* have job alternatives stay in teaching while feeling unhappy and trapped, often for the rest of their careers.

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